



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & RESOLUTION



Leaders

Version 1.7

**Development Associates
International**
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Conflict Management & Resolution

Introduction to the Course



Development Associates International

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Course Description

Every organization and group of people experiences conflict. To be a successful leader one needs to know how to use it constructively. This module addresses the individual and group dynamics of getting to common ground. It analyzes the nature of conflict and how it develops in individuals, relationships, and within an organization. Students examine methodologies for constructively intervening and managing conflict.

Learning Objectives for the course:

- **Understand** that the study method for this course is an adult “Distance Learning” model.
- **Learn** the problems and potentials in managing and resolving conflict in the context of ministry and organizational leadership.
- **Examine** case studies as examples for evaluation and learning how to deal with conflict through actual events and histories that demonstrate the models used in the course. The names, locations, and some facts have been altered to protect identities.
- **Examine** relevant Biblical texts for the purpose of managing conflict and working toward resolution of issues from a Biblical perspective.
- **Consider** the significance of understanding human cultures in conflict management.

Recommended Reading:

The reading for this course is contained in the Modules.

Module Units:

Unit 1 How Should Christian Leaders Think about Conflict?

Unit 2 What Obstacles do Christian Leaders Face in Handling Conflict?

Unit 3 How Do Christian Leaders Resolve Conflict? Learning to Forgive.

Unit 4 How Do Christian Leaders deal with Conflict?

Unit 5 How do Christian Leaders Manage Socio-political Conflict?

Unit 6 The Incarnation: The Supreme Model for Conflict Management & Resolution

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Unit 5130-150
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Course Information

Introduction & Overview

This is the beginning of the study Conflict Management and Resolution for Christian Leaders. Over the next few months you will be engaged with us in a process of reshaping and renewing key elements of your relationships and how you handle conflict.

This course is designed for Christian leaders:

- Who have settled many of their basic issues for Christian leadership,
- Who have committed themselves to an authentic Christian walk,
- Who have committed themselves to servant leadership with integrity and goodness toward their fellow man,
- Who are willing to spend time and effort on overcoming weakness and develop skills needed for quality leadership.

Authors:

Tom Wisely and Sandi Wisely



Dr. Tom Wisely has the MA and PhD degrees from Fuller Theological Seminary. His BA in Missiology/Theology is from Simpson College. He has taught at a number of institutions including Biola, Seattle Pacific University, Wheaton College and Tokyo Christian University. He is now the Educational Director of Eduventure, Indonesia. He is co-editor with Chuck Kraft, Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity (William Carey Library, 1981).



Sandi Wisely has a Masters degree from Wheaton College Graduate School in Marketing and Communication. She has a B.Th. from Alliance Theological Seminary (Philippines), and a BA degree in Christian Education from Simpson College. She has taught at Ebenezer Bible College in the Philippines. She served as Director of Refugee Services for World Relief for several years.

Sandi and I served as missionaries to Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines and Japan from 1965. Our work was among both urban and rural people, some of whom were afflicted with Hanson's Disease (Leprosy) in Thailand. Others were physically beautiful, well educated but broken in spirit. Our early work included church planting, medical paramedic work, community development, marriage counseling, rehabilitation of widows and prostitutes and extension theological education programs. Tom later taught at a theological seminary in the Philippines and at several universities in the United States and Japan. Altogether we have lived cross culturally for about 25 years largely in East and Southeast Asia. Sandi studied in the area of temperament types, learning styles, journalism and marketing in addition to her studies in education, Bible and theology. You will see her compassion and

personal struggles in this course as well as her spiritual hunger. We have raised three sons and a daughter during these years and now they are married and have families of their own. We have six grandchildren plus one who is now with God in heaven.

During these years we have lived through lots of conflict, especially in Northeast Thailand during the war years of 1966 - 1975. One might expect that the most difficult conflict we experienced would have been during that period. While those years were occasioned by serious conflict both externally (the war) and internally (the "Mission") we learned that conflicts within our own selves and among our peers were among the most difficult. We bring our cultural backgrounds of confrontation from the Southwest United States. Challenged by Scripture and anthropology, our desire is to do better in conflict situations than we have in the past, so we come to you as learners as well as teachers. What we share with you here is an amalgamation of our academic life and our personal experience. We come to you not so much as professional teachers, though we are that, but as fellow laborers in the fields to which God has called us.

Note on Method

It's important to interact with what you read. One way to do that is to mark a passage or section in a special way; such as underlining, highlighting or using question marks (?) or exclamations marks (!) that help call your attention to that which you want to recall or look at again. Please notice the margins to the right of your workbook page. You'll find room there to make personal observations, raise questions or state issues as you read through the material. You can raise these questions in your internet/ email conversations with the professor who teaches the course. And you can use this area to write notes to yourself to help you review for the final exam.

Note on Processing the Material

You will find interactive tasks in each unit, usually marked by subtitles such as: "For your reflection," and "Think about this." These indicators request that you stop further reading and bring your own experience to bear on the issue(s) being discussed. This may not work for every student but you are encouraged to recall situations of conflict to which a particular idea or model being discussed might be especially relevant. Write down your thoughts in the box provided or in the margin to the right of the text. This course is not merely an academic exercise. The expectation is that you will find ways to forgive and/or reconcile yourself to people or organizations from which you have been separated in negative ways. Integration of this course with other DAI courses is encouraged. We are not so interested in success stories as we are in integrity, ethics, spirituality and struggles that help us to go deeper in the areas of understanding and resolution.

Select Bibliography:

Selecting texts for this course has been a perplexing decision. We have had to consider several issues:

- First, we believe that an MA degree which the student will be proud of having achieved must fulfill adequate reading requirements for the course.
- Second, we want books on the subject that are relevant to all culture.

- Third, we want books that are relevant to the subject matter and that transcend the ethnicity of the culture.
- Fourth, the “distance learning” strategy employed by DAI curriculum tailors the reading requirements for an MA degree to a more intensive and focused approach.
- Finally, we are conscious of the need to keep the cost of this course within the financial reach of leaders in cultures where the purchase of text books represent a huge financial outlay. To keep the costs within the reach of those taking the course we have received permission from the publishers to print the relevant portions of the core texts within the body of the workbook.

With these considerations in mind we decided to select two books (Osterhaus and Elmer) as core relevant to the subject. Though the authors are not African or Asian their cross cultural experience makes them sensitive to the cross-cultural composition of the student populations served by this and other DAI courses.

1. The Osterhaus text uses a “case study” approach that makes it easy to read. His conflict management models are basic and professionally well done. The text size is appropriate to our distance learning strategy.
2. The Elmer book adds an intercultural dimension to conflict management while his models supplement those of the Osterhaus text. Both authors have extensive cross cultural experience.

Please note the select bibliography below. This list of books represents the sources cited in this course.

- Elmer, Duane. *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. 1993.
- Ford, Leighton. *Transforming Leadership: Jesus’ Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values & Empowering Change*. Downers Grove, IL. Intervarsity Press. 1991.
- Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. & Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House. 1996.
- Love, Rick. *Peacemaking: Resolving Conflict, Restoring & Building Harmony in Relationships*. Pasadena, CA. William Carey Library. 2001.
- Osterhaus, James P, Joseph M. Jurkowski & Todd A. Hahn. *Thriving through Ministry Conflict: Understanding Your Red & Blue Zones*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan. 2005
- Palmer, Donald C. *Managing Conflict Creatively*. Pasadena, CA. William Carey Library. 1999.
- Sande, Ken. *The Peace Maker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*. Grand Rapids, Baker Books. 2005.

Conflict Management & Resolution

Unit 1

How Should Christian Leaders Think About Conflict?



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Course Structure

This module is comprised of 6 units, all designed in such a way that the student can normally complete the work within 12 weeks. It involves thoughtful engagement with the written materials, responding to tasks that accompany the texts and the completion of assignments, three of which are to be sent to the professor at the end of designated units on a schedule to be agreed upon at the residency period.

Note on Method

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Some Perspectives We Bring to this Course

1. We are committed to the strengths of distance learning strategies. While residential type programs have strengths, distance learning provides a context for mature learners who know more what they need in the way of tools for more effective ministry. I believe that education should not get in the way of learning and distance learning strategies helps learners move in that direction.
2. Many Christians have a tendency to run from conflict. We hope by avoiding conflict we might bring peace. Though this might appear to be the least painful way approach, in reality it is the most difficult. Conflict cannot be avoided. The problem is not conflict but how people see each other when they are in conflict. In this unit we will focus on the people involved in the conflict and how they produce the conflict rather than become part of the solution.
3. We've observed that Christian teaching sometimes leads us to expectations that are beyond the possibilities of reality. Conflict often is the result of expectations. Lacking clear communications, not maintaining established boundaries and having unclear standards, situations evolve that are characterized by confusion and misperception. A good axiom to follow is this: "The closer your expectations are to reality the happier you will be, and the more conflict you will avoid.
4. Dealing with Conflict and conflict resolution is extremely important for Christian leaders. This course will give you the skills, tools, and opportunity through practice and application to face conflict in a mature and workable manner. In dealing with conflict properly you will find spiritual rest and even physical health for your work in the Kingdom.

5. Leaders find their biggest stress in the area of conflict and people problems. Rather than seeing conflict as a possibility for creativity and progress they view it as painful, time consuming and a hindrance to the message and work they are called to do. Our purpose is to bring conflict into a different light. We want you to realize that conflict can be a potential for new possibilities rather than a liability.
6. Students will find few references to “church discipline” in this course. This is not to say that church discipline is not important or irrelevant to the subject for it is part of the true church and should be addressed at the appropriate time and by the appropriate agency or person. For our purposes we want to bring students of this course to a point of forgiveness, establishing new patterns in forming relationships which will better prevent the need for church discipline.
We encourage grace and emphasize Biblical methods that bring about healing and make the church strong. Those who feel they need more information on formal church discipline should consult their respective denominations and do a thorough study of Scripture walking fearfully and wisely into this area of administration.
7. **Finally**, this course has been requested by Christian leaders around the world who know they need help in the area of conflict. This emphasis is not unique. Literally thousands of books and articles have been published on the subject.

Application:

We have stated some personal perspectives we bring to this study in the list above. In the box below please add your own perspectives or perhaps reasons for doing this study. List as many as you can think of.

Answer Box # 1



Case Study

We begin our study with an actual event (case study) that illustrates some of the essential components of conflict. The identities have been changed in the case to protect reputations but the event is accurate in its details. Remember, case studies are actual life events, not inventions, and therefore represent credible experience to reflect upon. This case study, and others presented throughout the course are taken from various cultural contexts. Sometimes cultural diversity provides a clearer perspective to similar issues.

Here's how it works. Read the case study with pencil or pen in hand and take notes in the margin to the right of the text. Organize your notes in three categories: (1) list the **characters** and a brief one or two-word description of each; (2) state the **issue(s)** illustrated in the case; and (3) state briefly what you would do to **reconcile** the conflict.

Organizational Conflict: A study in Expectations.

A young talented couple, Joseph and Hilda, were hired from a distant geographical area to work in the office of a small but growing international organization. They were highly recommended and known to other staff members and were well prepared for the new and challenging job.

The older couple, Rajesh and Mary, had worked with the organization for 12 years and needed more help as well as relief and an opportunity to further their own developing cross-cultural teaching ministry.

The older couple saw this as an opportunity to train the younger couple, educate them on international ministries, and bring new technology and efficiency to the office. The experience they brought with them from their former jobs was promising and everyone in the organization looked forward to their coming.

Within a short time however, after their arrival, there developed strong tensions between the two couples. The older couple opened their home to the younger couple. Mary provided food and encouragement and helped set up the household for the new arrivals. She wanted to be sure they were comfortable. Rajesh and Mary introduced the new couple to their church, their friends and family hoping it would help them transition into a community.

Also, Mary worked hard to find volunteers to work with Hilda and Joseph so they would not have the heavy work load she and Rajesh had carried for so many years.

Rajesh, for his part, took Joseph shopping and showed him where the car repair shop was located, the travel agent, the bargain hardware store, and other things that would help him in his work.

The perspective of the younger couple viewed the older couple as being controlling. They felt as if they were being required to be and do exactly what the older couple had done. And they wanted to find a church on their own. They resented Rajesh controlling the staff meetings because they wanted to present their own ideas and changes, and what they would be doing in the new position.

The older couple viewed the younger couple as being insubordinate, disgruntled, and critical. They seemed unappreciative.

The younger couple perceived themselves as administrators in the organization. The young man's father was a mission administrator. The older couple believed that their years of experience overseas as well as the years with the founding and development of the organization gave them the position of managing staff meetings, hosting and guiding the

agenda for weekly staff meetings.

The younger couple was extremely frustrated because they wanted to develop their own dreams and have control over the office. They knew they could organize the office better, work more effectively and develop policies which would prevent stress and give guidelines tot the organization

Can you see from this situation how expectations of the two couples resulted in conflict?

Even though both couples were committed Christians, and both spent time together, it was obvious that the younger couple was extremely unhappy with the relationship and with their new jobs.

Think about it!

Answer Box # 2

Consider the situation of conflict in which Rajesh, Mary, Joseph and Hilda find themselves.

1. List any conflicting expectations you observe that each couple brought to this situation.
2. In what way(s) did expectations play a role in the breakdown of relationship?
3. What can be done to keep this situation from becoming a crisis?
4. Can you think of any situation you have had that is in some way or ways similar



learning

Reading:

Pause here for a few moments now and read the following material from James Osterhaus, *Thriving through Ministry Conflict; A Dangerous and Difficult Path*, pages 13– 25. You can find this at the end of the unit in the reading section. As you read these pages take notes in the answer box (#3).

Answer Box # 3

1. Do you find Phil's reaction of "rage" in the last paragraph of p. 25 an "unspiritual" one? How would you describe or characterize his reaction?
2. Write the names of the main characters: Phil, Barry, Elliott, Henry, etc.
3. What was Phil's "great error?"
4. On page 16, Osterhaus states that there are two great challenges facing ministry. These are: faulty _____ and personal _____.
5. Have you ever had feelings like these? If so, state in one word the experience or person that triggered the response.

Perhaps you noticed among the many themes running through the story of Rajesh, Mary, Joseph and Hilda that they are all Christians, strongly committed to a single vision and that they care deeply for the goals of the organization. Indeed, among other things, it is this deep caring that set the stage for their conflict.

A contradiction? Not really. In fact, as James Osterhaus and his colleagues observed in their excellent book, *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict*, "the more pastors care, the more they are set up to fail" (2005:15). What we have here is something much more constructive than a contradiction. We have a paradox. Osterhaus suggests that deeply caring leaders are likely to make the mistake of attempting to "meet all of the expectations of their congregations" (ibid:15).

We are not suggesting that they should not care! It is their deep caring that led them to their mutual commitments to the overarching vision, goals and objectives of the organization. The issue is really about their expectations. Osterhaus states two consequences that accrue to those who try to meet all their expectations:

1. Leaders run themselves ragged and destroy their own lives and the lives of their family members.
2. Leaders send the wrong message..... "Yes, I can do it all" (ibid:15).

Against this backdrop of **faulty expectations** is the teaching of the Apostle Paul who said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). While this verse provides confidence beyond our frailties it has also been construed to mean that

there is “nothing I can’t do,” a kind of triumphalistic message that defies the reality of living in a fallen world among fallen people. There is also the “thorn in the flesh” Paul experienced throughout his life. Even though he prayed to be delivered from it he had to live with this less than perfect condition in his life.

I need to hasten to add here that the confidence Paul has in this text is well founded! It is true that through Christ we do overcome the obstacles of life. At the same time the tension between this “in Christ” statement and the reality of our humanness produces a situation of ambiguity in which we don’t always live up to the expectations of our faith.

So, what should be our attitude as Christian leaders? Osterhaus asks an important question; is conflict a friend or foe? I think he gives to us a perspective that must be embraced as we embark on this quest for dealing with the issue of conflict.

Let’s **pause** here for a moment. Stop and reflect upon what we’ve covered to this point.

Answer Box # 4

List any conflict situations or relationships you face at the moment. Don’t be too thoughtful however. There is no need at this point to do more than simply list them. You will be asked to revisit one or more of these later.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



learning

Now, let’s **continue** with establishing a proper attitude toward conflict.

First, conflict is inevitable. Escaping conflict while living in this world is about as likely as living without oxygen. The oldest text in the Bible attests to this. Though it was Eliphaz who said it, Job didn’t disagree and his life seems to substantiate the comment: “Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7 KJV).

Regardless how well family members may get along we don’t live long among them before realizing that sibling squabbles happen. Husbands and wives, in spite of their initial affection for each other find soon enough that conflicts emerge in the course of living together. Being hired to work in an organization is in itself testimony of one’s desire to be part of that group, and yet it is not long before “turf wars,” interpersonal irritations and personal dissatisfactions raise their ugly heads.

One can approach this inevitability with any of several attitudes: regret, anger, resentment, bitterness, rejection, to name only a few. Another option is one of “acceptance.” One of my favorite poems was written by Amy Carmichael entitled “*In Acceptance Lieth Peace*.” The recurring theme is that when we can’t change problems or negotiate a path toward peace by other means then by accepting the situation is an option. Of course one wants to stop short of fatalism or simply giving up. There’s a fine line that separates the two.

Second, Osterhaus talks about “thriving” in places where we serve, not simply “surviving.” Christian leaders can see conflict as opportunity for growth and building stronger relationships. Osterhaus points out, “the problem is not conflict, per se, but how people relate to one another when they are in conflict” and he cites three positive outcomes of conflict:

1. it elicits different points of view
2. it clears the air
3. it leads to the resolution of complex issues (ibid 16)
4. It gives God a chance to work and change us.

The point to be taken is that we should look for hidden purposes behind or within the situation or person of conflict.

Third, conflict has a greater purpose than its immediate pain.

I was sitting at a desk in a mission office in Bangkok. A missionary colleague sat across from me as we discussed a financial matter. I knew that our relationship had not been good but I had never been able to put my finger on precisely what it was that brought conflict into it. So, I asked if I had offended him in some way. His response was, “Tom, I don’t like you; don’t like your personality or anything about you.” Shocked, I asked if there was nothing I could do to make amends, to repair the relationship. His response was “no, I’ve never liked you and I never will.”

Several days later I approached the senior missionary to the one who disliked me, and told him about the conversation. His response was, “Tom, not everyone will be your friend. But we have to get along with everyone as best we can.” His advice to me was to make the best of the relationship but not to let it get in the way of my effectiveness in ministry. I continued to serve as a missionary in the same organization with this man and I believe his opinion never changed, but we managed to work without having major conflict. I learned from this experience that conflict does not always evolve into ineffectiveness.

The Apostle Paul put it this way:

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. (II Corinthians 1:8,9 NIV)

We see in these words from the Apostle that situations of hardship, stress and conflict have a purpose, and as such provide for us a Biblical perspective. Paul’s words, “the sentence of death” express a condition of extreme gravity. Notice however, that he sees the purpose in it. The words “*But this happened that*” reflect a purpose; namely that Paul learn to rely on God on not on his own credentials, of which he had many!

Biblical Perspective on Conflict

The inevitability of conflict, realizing it has a purpose, especially for Christians is really not enough to establish a proper perspective about conflict from a Christian perspective. More is needed. We turn now to a more profound Biblical perspective.

Since peace and unity are essential elements of the Christian community you can be sure the Scriptures are full of references on these subjects. You can also be sure that we have an enemy whose name means “adversary” and he wants us to be in conflict. Satan

promotes conflict, but God can use it for good.

Answer Box # 5

Read Ephesians 4:26-27 and summarize in your own words in the box below what you observe from this text about the actions of Satan when we become angry. What did you learn from this text?



learning

Answer Box # 6

Now, read I Peter 5:8b and write in the box below what you learn about Satan, greed and dishonesty and how that leads to conflict. What did you learn from this text?

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. NIV

Among other things we learn from these texts and our comments above we can see that having both a positive point of view and a biblical perspective we can embrace conflict in the same way we embrace trials which will make us stronger. There are times when we must choose to go through the conflict with patience and endurance knowing that what we are doing is God's work. He will develop the plan. He will give mercy and grace. As we learn to wait on the Lord and be patient, we will see the benefits of trials and conflict.

Once we deal with conflict successfully we become strong, humble and hopeful. Read the following passage and then be prepared to describe what happens to the believer who experiences difficulties and conflict.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Romans 5:1-5 NIV).

Answer Box # 7

Describe in your own words what strengthening effect one of the conditions of conflict you stated in box #4 above is having in your life, or can have in your life. Be specific.

**learning**

Good lifetime friendships always seem to have a testing period of genuine conflict. If the friends can work through the conflict, then the relationship grows deeper and becomes better. If they cannot the friendship fades. The stronger the conflict, the more of a challenge it will be, but also the better the friendship can become for having been tested. So it is with our conflicts in the Christian Community.

God values unity among His people. Early Christians were known by their love for each other (Colossians 1:4). Unity is so important that sometimes we must choose unity over being right. We must value unity and defer to others for the sake of unity. This is our witness and it is our joy. There is no better evidence of the love of Christ and the power of God than a church that is unified in Christ and that deals with conflict in a mature way with sacrifice and grace, and keeps the bond of fellowship.

This is not an easy thing to do! We must keep our expectations in line with reality, realizing that we are sinners saved by God's grace and that we are dealing with sinners, some of whom are products of God's grace while others are not.

Let's see what the Bible teaches that will motivate us toward practicing unity and resolving conflict. The Bible not only teaches peacemaking and unity among the Body of Christ, it commands it.

Read again the following text and be prepared to interact with it in the box below:

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." NIV

Answer Box # 8

How do you relate to this text? Is there a "roaring lion" prowling around seeking to bring harm to you?

Name the situation or person:

Describe how you feel about this:

Based on this Scripture what should be your response?:



learning

Now **read** this next text and interact with it in the box below.

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Rom 15:5-7)

Answer Box # 9

Did you notice in this passage the instruction to accept others? Acceptance is a big part of peace-making.! Name someone you need to accept and briefly describe why acceptance is needed.



learning

And again, **read** the following text and interact in the box below.

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: . . . hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. . . (Gal 5:19-22)

Answer Box # 10

Is it possible that being at peace is a choice? Explain?

Finally, take five minutes and quietly meditate on the following verses. Apply them to your mind and heart as best you can. If you are involved in a conflict, use these verses to motivate you to bring unity, peace and to resolve the conflict. Write any thoughts that come to during this quiet time in the margin to the right.

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one Body you were called to peace." (Col 3:13, 25)

"Live at peace with each other . . . Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong." (1 Thess. 5:13b-15)

James 1:12 teaches us that

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial¹ for once he has been approved (by God), he will receive the crown of life. . . "

Intercultural Conflict

It may seem a bit unusual to include cultural considerations here but an interesting fact is that geopolitical global issues seem to rotate around intercultural conflict. One has only to Google the words "cultural conflict" to become inundated with more than a year's readings of journals, books and essays. The overwhelming and obvious concern of educators, political figures, leaders of religions and more importantly the average citizen on whatever continent one chooses to look, is that the primary issue is really not ideological but rather it is cultural.

Alma Abdul-Hadi Jadallah describes a situation of cultural conflict in her paper "*Conflict Theory and Cultural Paradigms*" in which this issue is described. The paper was presented at the Al-Hewar Center (geographic location not disclosed) on January 27, 2006.

.....a Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his international transcendental meditation movement are fighting a bitter battle with their neighbors in a European village over the St. Ludwig monastery, which is considered a historical national monument for the villagers. The battle arose because the guru plans to demolish the historic Franciscan monastery partly because it doesn't face due east. According to the Maharishi's architectural theories, building entrances should face east so they can gather their energy from the rising sun. The monastery is 29 degrees off. Bad architecture, according to one of the group's many glossy pamphlets, promotes anxiety, bad luck and even criminal tendencies.

Notice that the conflict described above really has nothing to do with a political or economic ideology (socialism(s), democracy, monarchy, etc) but rather socio-cultural issues. She posits that “.....to understand the behavior of parties to a conflict is to understand the “grammar” they are using to render that behavior meaningful, we need to educate ourselves about that grammar” (*ibid*). By *grammar* she means the cultural worldview of a people, their values and understandings about what is important.

More will be said about cultural considerations in Unit 5, but we note here at the very beginning of our study the importance of understanding human beings within their cultural contexts as an important, if not the first, step in managing conflict. We would say that moving toward resolution of conflict ultimately must include this key component.

Let's pause a moment.

Read Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict*, pgs 11 – 22. Again you find this reading at the end of the unit in the ‘Reading Section’. Finished? Ok, now answer the questions in the box below:

Answer Box # 11

1. Why is understanding another culture's worldview important?
2. What theological reasons did you find for cultural understanding?
3. What significance do you see in “telling a lie” in South Africa as opposed to “losing one's temper?”



learning

Final Assignment

Compulsory Assignment #1



application

1. Among situations of conflict you are facing now, select one and name it here:
2. Analyze this conflict you have named and try to focus on any false expectations you may have that might have contributed to the conflict. List them here:
3. What do the Scriptures inform you about this conflict? Did you find any ideas or instruction how to deal with it here? If so please state them. Please don't feel that this unit has answered all your questions about conflict. We have only begun. So say only what you feel is real and true here.
4. Think about the situation of conflict you are dealing with here. Can you identify any cultural issues in it? If so list them.

Summary & Conclusion:

We've come to the end of Unit 1. What have we learned?

1. We've learned that "expectations" can be overwhelming and that they must be brought into a proper biblical perspective.
 2. We've also learned that the Scriptures have a lot to say about how to manage conflict. They provide specific instructions how to deal with it in ways that are often counter cultural.
 3. And we have learned that cultural considerations are very important to conflict management and resolution.
- Now we turn our attention to Unit 2, *What Obstacles do Christian Leaders Face in Handling Conflict?*

Readings



The following readings are taken from those previously mentioned textbooks:

Osterhaus, James P, Joseph M. Jurkowski & Todd A. Hahn. *Thriving through Ministry Conflict: Understanding Your Red & Blue Zones*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan. 2005.

Elmer, Duane. *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. 1993.

We thank the Publishers for granting us permission to integrate the respective chapters of the books in the DAI workbook.

1. James Osterhaus, *Thriving through Ministry Conflict* pages 13 – 25

Introduction

A Dangerous and Difficult Path

The pathway of leadership is dangerous and difficult. This is doubly true for the man or woman in ministry. Take a look at this true story.

An Exhausted Pastor

Pastor Phil had good reason for his anxiety. His three-year ministry at a small midwestern church was shaping up to be a colossal failure. He had run up against a brick wall the likes of which few in ministry had experienced. A small but influential group in this aging, ingrown congregation of two hundred had early on tangled with Pastor Phil over the changes he was bringing to the church. Over time, he had become sensitive to their repeated criticisms and had finally worn to the breaking point.

In any organization, voices of dissent provide clues about unexpressed pain within the organization. However, these voices are often misinterpreted by the leaders of the organization because they are seen as oppositional. It is hard to hear the message when one feels personally attacked, when every action is questioned and every good idea is opposed.

Pastor Phil found himself in this very dilemma. He didn't understand the resistance to his initiatives, since most of the parishioners apparently agreed with his values and vision. No matter what he had tried, no matter how he had handled conflicts, the situation had grown steadily worse, and he and his family had suffered. This suffering had created doubt in Pastor Phil, doubt about his ability to lead and doubt about his vocation. As he had grown more and more depressed, he had also struggled with growing bitterness and resentment.

The search committee which had called him knew they needed a leader who would challenge the church community. They knew [14] Pastor Phil would confront contradictions in beliefs and behaviors; they knew he would never compromise his integrity. They wanted Pastor Phil to do what they could not do.

Pastor Phil's great error was innocence. He never understood that integrity is not necessarily valued, or that it is not a formula for popularity. He naively thought that new ideas would be greeted with enthusiasm. He thought that the long-term interests of the many would always win over the short-term interests of the few. He thought that because the community needed and said they wanted change, they would embrace it, and that in appreciation for his efforts, they would embrace him and his family. Instead, as he confronted the contradictions he saw in the church, he was attacked. He felt betrayed and wounded, and he personalized the attacks, which not only confused him but created shame and guilt in the members of the parish.

The church had been doing things in certain ways for years and had never been confronted about their behavior by previous pastors. They in turn felt wounded, betrayed, and personally attacked by Pastor Phil. They didn't understand what he was doing or why he was upset.

As time passed, Pastor Phil was worn down. He could not tone down the conflict, depersonalize the attacks coming at him, or rebuild relationships within the congregation. Finally, he left the church.

Faulty Expectations and Intense Personal Conflict

Between the three of us, we have over seventy years of experience working with pastors and churches, serving on church staffs, and fulfilling the role of pastor. We have found Pastor Phil's story to be the rule and not the exception. Good men and women with a calling for the Lord's work become exhausted, then defeated, and finally leave the ministry.

It is our observation that the average minister is

- highly committed,
- confused by the unrealistic expectations of others,
- and overwhelmed and frightened by incomprehensible conflict. [15]

What goes wrong for pastors everywhere, over and over again? Faulty expectations that lead to intense personal conflict.

Adjust Expectations, Don't Satisfy Them

Here's an interesting paradox. The more pastors care, the more they are set up to fail. The reason they fail is because they tend to make perhaps the most serious error a leader can make. They attempt to meet all of the expectations of their congregation.

This attempt has two consequences:

1. Leaders run themselves ragged and destroy their own lives and the lives of their family members.

2. Leaders send the wrong message to their congregations, and especially to those needy individuals who have a great deal of woundedness from the past. This message is, "Yes, I can do it all. I can heal those wounds. I'm the right person for you." But sending this message is a recipe for disaster because leaders invariably are unable to meet all of their congregants' expectations.

So what's the answer to this dilemma? How can the pastor deal effectively with the congregation, and especially those deeply wounded people who want, who demand, that he or she heal all of their wounds, fix their defects, and compensate for their deficiencies?

It's not that ministers necessarily need to care less. What we recommend is caring within legitimate expectations. Quite simply, the task is not to meet unrealistic expectations. And we're not just talking about the unrealistic expectations of others. We're also talking about the unrealistic expectations we have of ourselves, expectations that we are often unaware that we have. The task is to adjust those unrealistic expectations first in ourselves and then in others.

But it is here, in the area of meeting expectations, that we find ministers have the most difficulty, and the least amount of competence, handling relational situations within their parishes. And so unmet expectations inevitably lead to personal conflict. [16]

Conflict: Friend or Foe?

Most ministers run from conflict. And yet they are constantly drawn into it, despite taking every possible measure to avoid it. Books written to assist ministers often paint the congregation and the ruling board as the enemy of the minister. But we have a different view. Consider these points:

- Conflict is inescapable. Given differences in gender, back-ground, cultural distinctiveness, and personality, it's no wonder we disagree a lot.

The problem is not conflict, per se, but how people relate to one another when they're in conflict.

- Conflict is a good and necessary thing:
 - It elicits different points of view.
 - It clears the air.
 - It leads to the resolution of complex issues.

We know ministry is dangerous. Anyone who has been in it for more than a few months knows this. But we have also found that the hopeless patterns into which we fall can be understood and turned to redemptive purposes.

Thriving through Conflict

This book is about surviving and thriving in the places to which God has called you to minister. We're going to take a look at the two greatest challenges facing ministry leaders—faulty expectations and personal conflict—and what links them. And we're going to guide you through the three simple principles indispensable to any successful minister, whether ordained or lay. To accomplish these goals, we have chosen to tell a fictional story, a story similar to Pastor Phil's. Through this story, you will learn the principles everyone who is in ministry needs to know to survive and thrive through conflict.

After you have finished chapters 1-9, we encourage you to spend time working through the response activities in the back of the book, [17] either by yourself or in a group, to help you implement these principles in your ministry.

Hold on now! Get ready. This book is going to begin and end with you. [18-19]

CHAPTER 1 Welcome to the Jungle

Barry Wolf was getting used to the headaches. They started in the back of his head and worked their way relentlessly to a point behind his eyes so that no amount of kneading his les helped. When a headache hit, he had to accept the misery until sleep or half a bottle of ibuprofen kicked in. It was no way to live if one wanted to lead a church effectively. And Barry was all about effectiveness.

After a ten-year career in insurance sales, Barry had come to the conclusion that God wanted him to become a pastor. Packing up his family, including two kids, Barry moved across the country for ministerial studies. Putting his rare combination of people skills and organizational acumen to work, Barry finished school early and landed his first pastorate, leading the First Community Church of Elizabethton, Illinois.

Barry had moved into his first call with the conviction that churches in the twenty-first century should be more than traditional chaplaincies and social clubs for the spiritually minded. He believed that the church should have an impact in the community and should function as an effective, life-changing organization by leading people to follow Christ closely and to live that out in their day-to-day lives. Barry wasn't sure how to make this happen, but he had both theological and commonsense business training and figured he could work it out in the field.

The call process had been a fairly straightforward one. Jim Gren-dell, the chairman of the search committee, combined the precision of a veteran CPA with the winsomeness of a gifted salesman. He was also refreshingly honest, even blunt, qualities that Barry admired, even if his own people-pleasing tendencies occasionally prevented him from practicing them. [20]

"Look," said Jim, "I believe that you are the man for this job. You are in your mid-thirties, so you are not wet behind the ears. At the same time, this is your first pastorate, so you are not coming in with a lot of preconceptions. You also have a background as a salesperson, which you are going to need to turn this church around."

Jim described a church whose best days were behind it but which had potential for the future. First Community had been founded during the church boom years of the 1950s and had grown quickly. Located in a fairly affluent suburb of Chicago, the church attracted a wide spectrum of members, from young families to retirees. Its programs for children were known throughout the area, it boasted a series of gifted pastors, and the church made a significant contribution toward meeting the needs of the disadvantaged in the community.

The church's growth stabilized in the mid-1960s and stayed level for about another decade. In the 1970s the demographics of the community began to change as many families moved a bit farther away from the Chicago center. Those left behind tended to be older folks who had no desire to move and those who could not afford to move. In time the ethnic composition of the area began to change as well, and First Community, which had been mostly white, did not reflect this change. By the early 1990s the sanctuary, which seated 700 and had been filled nearly to capacity for years, held about 225 worshipers on Sunday morning, and the median age of the congregation was spiking upward.

Driven in part by the economic boom of the mid- to late-1990s, young families began to repopulate Elizabethton, but again the church wasn't able to attract this new population. By 2000, when Barry took the reins as pastor, the church's beautiful structure and rich history belied its decline in members, finances, and energy.

Barry was not one to shy away from a challenge and so had had no difficulty deciding to come to First Community. With Jim's stated support and the sense of the search committee that Barry was the one to lead the church in its efforts to reach young families and so revitalize itself, Barry and his family had moved to Elizabethton with high hopes and trust in God. [21]

The next three years had been the longest of Barry's life. The congregation's worship seemed lifeless. There was a shortage of volunteers in every area. Offerings provided enough money to pay salaries and keep the building up, but there were few resources to expand ministry and create new programs, things Barry knew were essential to reach the changing community.

Worst of all, some of his early allies had become antagonists. The search committee had invited him specifically because he was young and creative and they knew the church needed to change. But when Barry began to implement changes—even minor ones to make the worship services livelier and to brighten the children's ministry rooms—he met resistance that seemed wholly out of proportion to his decisions.

The great shock was that Jim Grendell had become his nemesis.

Five minutes into Barry's first board meeting at First Community Church, it was clear who called the shots—Jim. Jim was not a physically imposing man, but he had a presence about him. He could talk to anyone about nearly everything and did so with charm. He was well spoken, was looked to as a mentor by many, and in spite of his apparent strength was given to emotion and even tears when discussing an issue important to him. And usually others followed him.

Jim was the kind of guy you wanted on your side and the exact person you hoped and prayed wasn't aligned against you, because, Barry soon realized, Jim took no prisoners when something stood between him and his goals. And within a year Jim's apparent goal was to ensure that anything Barry proposed was shot down in flames.

Barry and his wife, Sophia, sometimes sat up late at night as Barry tried to divine what could have caused the change in Jim, at least the change that Barry perceived. Was Jim threatened by Barry? Was he insecure? Was he manipulative? Had he lied when he recruited Barry by saying the church wanted change, and then did everything he could to block change? Had Barry missed something? And most often, what could Barry *do* to get around Jim's obstructionism or to change the way Jim led in the church?

Now, Barry was ready to pack it in. The board was stalemated. Attendance was static. Finances were mediocre. And Jim's campaign [22] had taken on a new form—personal attacks against Barry. Barry heard the whispers. The pastor isn't what he appears to be. He takes a lot of long lunches, and doesn't it seem that pastors get a lot more time off than us working people? Why does he want to change everything around here? Who does he think he is? And according to some, Jim would occasionally tear up and say, "I had such hopes for him, for this church. But I think I was wrong. I am not at all sure that Barry is up to the task." All the while, in public, Jim presented himself as Barry's best friend and confidant.

All in all, Barry had led well and there were many in the church who supported him. The intrigue was mostly on the leadership level. But the conflict was killing Barry as board meetings turned into war zones, and initiatives which Barry felt were crucial died in subcommittees or mysteriously disappeared during the implementation phase.

In their late-night chats, Barry and Sophia had begun to talk about moving on. What most people didn't know was that behind his outgoing and friendly demeanor, Barry was a bit of a loner, prone to depression, and consumed with making others happy. He had never been able to understand these impulses fully, and now he knew he was paying the price for not paying attention. Sophia was wise, compassionate, a good listener, and strong. She encouraged him to hang in there, to do what he knew to be right, and to be patient. But Barry wasn't so sure he could anymore.

CHICAGO HAS A LOT OF FREEZING GRAY DAYS in January, and this was one of them. Barry was in his office at the church, staring out the window at the warehouse directly across the street. Jim Grendell owned the warehouse and sometimes worked out of its small office, and this had become a constant reminder to Barry of the man's seeming omnipresence in Barry's life. The warehouse was an ugly thing, stark and unattractive, and surrounded by a barbed-wire laced fence.

Barry spun his office chair away from the window and faced the half-written resignation letter on his laptop screen. He wasn't sure he would submit it this week at the board meeting, but he surely wanted to have it ready to print out, just in case. [23]

On impulse he picked up his phone, hit the 9 key and punched in the number of his friend of nearly twenty years, Henry Grigg. Barry and Henry had been roommates in college, bonding almost immediately over their love for '80s hair-band music and the fact that both of them had emotionally absent fathers who had died before their sons had really got to know them. They laughed at their college musical tastes now, even as they realized as they got older how truly significant their incomplete relationships with their fathers were. Through the years, Henry and Barry had been a constant sup-port for one another, and support was what Barry needed now.

"What's up, punk?" answered Henry, and Barry chuckled at how caller ID had changed how we all deal with our telephones. But as much as he loved Henry's sense of humor, Barry was in no mood and said immediately that he needed to talk seriously.

Henry was all ears as Barry told his story in detail, emphasizing his discouragement and the near-monster he perceived Jim Grendell to be. When Barry had finished, there was silence for a long moment, broken by Henry's low whistle.

"Man," Henry said, "you have drawn a tough hand. Do you want to quit?"

Barry was surprised by how quickly he answered "Yes!" and then caught himself. "I mean I feel like it, but I am also convinced that God wanted me here and that my work here is not done. I just can't see being anything but ineffective and depressed because of this guy Jim and those he influences. I'm letting my thirties get away from me dealing with this stuff and giving this guy rent-free space in my head even when I'm not sitting across a meeting table from him."

"You know how much I hate quick advice," said Henry. "But I'm going to offer some anyway," he said, laughing gently. "You have to call an old friend of mine, a guy named Elliott Stevens. He helped me out a lot early in my career and was great at getting me to ask the right questions without forcing answers down my throat. I mean, he can be really blunt, and that is painful sometimes, but I still con-sult him over major decisions. He is a seriously good encourager."

Barry hesitated. "I barely have the energy to pick up the phone and call you, much less—" [24]

"Just drop a dime on him," Henry interrupted. "And drop my name. I know he will be willing to meet with you at least once. And what do you have to lose?"

And so Barry found himself outside a rather imposing brick house on a wooded lot in a peaceful, mostly underdeveloped suburb about forty-five minutes away. *He's got one of those heavy lion-head door knockers*, Barry thought. *Just great.*

As soon as Barry knocked, the door opened and Elliott Stevens was there. He smiled and invited Barry in, took his coat, pointed Barry toward his study, and went to get coffee.

ELLIOTT CAME INTO THE STUDY with two blue pottery cups and a stainless-steel thermos of steaming coffee. He wore crisply creased black pants, expensive Italian loafers, a light-blue Oxford shirt, and a black cardigan, which looked to be made of cashmere. His hair was presidentially white, and his eyes either blue or green—they seemed to change with the light, or what little there was as shadows fell in the comfortable book-lined study. He appeared to be anywhere from his early fifties to his late sixties in age.

Elliott sat in a leather wingback chair across from where Barry sank into a slightly overstuffed brown couch and fixed his eyes on his visitor. That was the first time Barry looked into his eyes, and even then he was struck by not only how their color changed but by how piercing they were, not quite threatening but not quite welcoming either.

"So, friend of Henry," Elliott began, "how can I be of service to you?"

Barry took a sip of his coffee and, a bit nervous, tried to make small talk.

"Oh, I don't know, really," he began. "I have heard Henry speak of you before and he thought we should get to know each other, thought you could be a good source of counsel for me. I guess I was wondering about your background. Henry was a little vague ... was it ministry or business or philanthropy ... ?"

Elliott was polite but not expansive. "Oh, I have done a lot of things, and different people probably think of me in very different ways," he replied. "But now, you are in ministry, and Henry says you are having a real problem in your parish. Please tell me about it." And so Barry did tell, the whole story with its high hopes and unfulfilled promises and his feelings of betrayal by Jim and his strong dislike of the man, feelings that he fought because he knew that Christians, especially pastors, aren't supposed to dislike anyone, at least not as strongly as he disliked Jim. He was surprised by how much he opened up to Elliott, with a torrent of words, really. And he was surprised at just how deep his resentment was of Jim. Elliott said almost nothing, not even acknowledging much of what Barry said, but it was clear that he was listening intently. Barry finally ran out of adrenaline and sank back in the couch, tired and sad and if anything even more depressed than before.

Elliott took several sips of his coffee, picked a piece of string off of his cardigan, got up, and adjusted the thermostat. Then he sat back down and fixed his eyes on Barry.

"Are you sure you are cut out to be a pastor?" Elliott asked in a clear, firm voice. Barry was too shocked to speak. "Because," Elliott continued, "I am not sure you have what it takes. It is a tough job, one of the toughest, and not all men and women are cut out for it.

"I really can't say much more or help you any until you have considered and answered that question," Elliott continued.

"I am willing to meet with you again, but if you choose to come back, I suggest that you answer that basic question first. If not, we will be wasting each other's time and also wasting time you could be looking for a line of work that might fit you better."

Before he realized what was happening, Barry was being bundled into his coat by Elliott and shown the door. "Feel free to call, Barry," Elliott said as he shut the door, "but do some serious thinking first. That seems to have been the one thing you have

not been doing."

Barely able to breathe, Barry stumbled down the long driveway toward his car. It wasn't until he had the key in the ignition and his seatbelt halfway on that the rage hit him.

2. Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict* pgs 11 – 22

THE AMAZING CONTOURS OF CONFLICT

It may be difficult to teach a person to respect another
unless we can help people to see things from the other's point of view.

KOHEI GOSHI

It was Sunday morning in the sleepy town of Amanzimtoti on South Africa's picturesque Indian Ocean coast. The heat was very intense. A light ocean breeze offered some relief, but I hardly noticed. I was scheduled to preach at a local church and was afraid of arriving late. My directions to the church were not too clear. I never quite knew what to expect when I visited a church for the first time. Sometimes church services would be held in a garage, sometimes under a big flamboyant tree spreading a huge umbrella of shade, sometimes in a town hall, sometimes in a tent attached to a residence. The people of rural South Africa possessed boundless ingenuity for creating worship spaces.

The service was to begin in a few minutes, and I was getting desperate. I spotted a petrol station and pulled in. Inevitably, the attendant was black (black workers have historically filled the unskilled jobs in this land of apartheid). The attendant came out and offered a courteous greeting. I quickly explained my problem and requested his help. Did he know the place I was searching for?

He stood up straight and looked left, then right, his right hand touching his chin reflectively. It seemed clear to me. He was looking back and forth to assess how best to direct me to my destination.

He gave me directions, and I raced off in accord with his verbal map, breathing easier. In a few minutes, though, it became clear that his help was taking me even farther from my destination. I stewed in frustration: Why had he steered me wrong? Now I would suffer certain embarrassment for tardiness. If he didn't know the location of the church, why hadn't he just said so? If he did know, why had he sent me on this wild goose chase in the opposite direction? It was so unfair.

Clearly, the man was either irresponsible, dishonest or downright devious. I had been trained to "think the best about the other person" and to follow biblical injunctions to "honor one another above your-selves." But surely these rules didn't have to be followed when one was dealing with people who, it seemed, were deliberately deceptive.

Gaining Perspective

When I first moved to South Africa, I had little understanding of cultural values other than my own. As a result, accurate interpretation of other people's actions was nearly impossible. I could see only through my own cultural lenses. I needed to learn and

adapt to the cultural lenses of the local people. That would require not setting my lenses aside, but adding theirs to mine. I did not need to give up my own cultural frame of reference to accept and appreciate one different from mine.

Like everyone else, I tend to be egocentric (that is, I believe my perspective is correct and better than yours; so I make little or no effort to understand yours). I simply assume that since I have an extensive education and other symbols of superiority, my judgments are better. I don't really think much about this assumption; it is just there.

But if I am willing to pay the price to learn another's cultural frame of reference, I can avoid many conflicts—and in the end, I will find myself the richer for it. In fact, we all need to gain understanding of other cultures, even if we never plan to leave the country we were born in. As our cities become more and more culturally diverse, multiculturalism is fast becoming a survival skill.

Biblical Insights

There are sound theological reasons for committing ourselves to understand other cultures and appreciate them wherever possible. Making that commitment will unfold for us new and wonderful dimensions of God's character, for our God can be properly revealed only through diversity.

When God had finished creating the world, he looked at the "vast array" (Gen 2:1) and announced that "it was very good" (Gen 1:31). To celebrate creation is to celebrate diversity, including diversities of people. And we cannot celebrate out of ignorance. Genuine celebration comes from genuine appreciation. This requires learning and understanding, and these are incompatible with egocentrism and superiority.

All people bear the image of God (Gen 1:27). To learn of them and from them with an open mind is to discover how God reveals something of himself through their distinct world and life view. As we know, all people have been injured by the Fall, by sin's hold on the world. Yet God's grace is present in all people and in all cultures. As we submit ourselves to learning from other cultures, we catch glimpses of God's grace that would be unavailable in our own culture.

We are called to love all people. But can I truly love someone I do not, at least in some measure, understand? Love requires some understanding of its object. That means love is culturally defined. When we truly love others, we love them in their own context, in keeping with the way they define love. We can't express love in a vacuum. It can be expressed egocentrically (my way) or sociocentrically (as the other person would define an act of love).

I am a North American, and in North America we have defined ways of showing friendship and love. One of those ways is to invite someone to my house for an evening meal together; we set a day and time for this meeting. Both parties understand this as a friendly, if not loving, act and something that will strengthen our relationship.

But in many parts of Africa, an invitation to come to my house at a designated time may not be interpreted as friendly and loving. In fact, it might be interpreted as a sign that I want a formal, distant relationship. Why?

In Africa one shows friendship by stopping in unannounced, perhaps at mealtime. If a time, place and agenda for meeting have to be prearranged, the relationship cannot be open and spontaneous and evolve naturally, or so the reasoning goes. Love is culturally defined.

Refreshing Cultural Insights

Gaining a new set of cultural lenses will bring a more accurate interpretation of cross-cultural conflict situations, like my problem with the wrong directions to church. The better we are at interpreting culture, the fewer conflicts we will experience, the more we will be able to build authentic relationships, and the greater will be our ability to communicate God's truth.

Let me ask you a question. Which is the greater sin: to tell a lie or to lose your temper? Take a moment to think about your answer, then register it in your mind. Take the question at face value; don't argue that all sin is equally abhorrent before God. Now, what is your answer?

Consider why you chose that particular answer. Why does your choice represent the greater sin? Suppose someone else chose the other answer. What possible reason(s) could support that choice?

Don't rush through this; it's very important. Take time to think it out.

In doing so you begin a process of cultural understanding that will be repeated thousands of times as you adjust to and minister in another culture.

Let me make a guess at your answer. If you are a North American or from Western Europe, and especially if you have white skin, you chose lying as the greater sin. If you are from another part of the world, my guess is that you chose losing your temper as the greater sin. If you are from the Western world (North America or Europe) but a person of color, you may have had difficulty choosing, since your heritage may allow you to offer reasoned argument for either answer.

Of course, here the real issue is not which answer is correct but why you perceive a given answer to be correct. In Western culture, especially among Western white people, a very high value is placed on accuracy and truth. So lying is the greater sin. Outside the Western world, for the most part, greater value is placed on relationships. Losing one's temper is a more grievous sin, because it represents a rupture in relationship.

You may argue that truth should be a higher value than relationship, but the reality is that the majority of the world thinks differently. That does not make the majority right, but it does suggest that it might be wise to try to understand why they see it that way.

How much does God value relationships? How much does he value truth?

Back to the Petrol Station

What does this have to do with a black petrol-station attendant's giving me inaccurate directions? Here is the connection. In this context relationship is valued over truth. African culture typically places great value on courtesy to the stranger and help to the needy. I qualified as both a stranger and a needy person. The last thing the attendant wanted to do was disappoint someone who was looking to him for assistance, and especially when he sensed it was assistance I urgently needed. So rather than disappoint me by not being able to help, and rather than risk my [15] thinking poorly of him, he gave me his best effort.

But there is more. In much of Africa, as well as in other parts of the world, not losing face is an important cultural value. It corresponds loosely to the Western idea of avoiding personal humiliation or embarrassment, but is far more compelling and powerful in determining behavior. We will examine this issue more closely later. The attendant wanted to avoid disappointing me in order to uphold the cultural value of courtesy and helping those in need. To admit that he did not have what I needed was to bring shame or loss of face upon himself. Both situations represented cultural taboos and would be avoided at whatever cost.

One last factor should be noted. The overwhelming majority of black people in South Africa traveled (and still do) either by foot or by public transportation. Riding a meandering bus or a speeding train, one rarely pays attention to street names. Paths often do not follow roads; even if they do, the names of the streets are rarely useful. Besides, following street names requires being able to read. Distances are measured in walking time, not driving time. Walkers use a very different set of words when giving directions (assuming they know precisely the destination) from those of a person in an automobile. The walker uses trees, rocks, hills, ditches and buildings as guideposts. The driver, however, relies on miles, number of traffic lights, street signs, blocks, building numbers and cross streets.

In retrospect, it may seem foolish that I imputed dishonesty or malice to the petrol-station attendant. But it only seems foolish now . . . now that I understand his cultural frame of reference. I learned it is unwise to make quick judgments about people's motives and character. It takes time, conversations, questions, listening and the whole range of learning skills to form accurate perceptions about people who are different from me. I must suspend judgment, maintain an open mind and seek more information (especially from those people I am prone to judge) before drawing conclusions. If I am too quick to judge or draw a conclusion, [16/17] my mind closes, learning stops, and the potential for building a relationship is lost. My assessment of others must be a conscious, intentional process, or I am likely to slip into my old habits and to do an injustice to people whom Christ loves and for whom he died.

You may never go to South Africa or even to the continent of Africa and may be wondering why you need to be concerned about cross-cultural communication. The answer is simple: wherever you go (even down the street from your home), you experience cultural differences that have the potential to become cultural conflict. You need to know how to handle these differences; otherwise you may well become mired in misunderstanding and conflict. If you try to manage conflict from your own frame of reference, there is a good chance you will make things worse, even if your intentions are good. Thus begins a cycle of confusion that leads to further frustration and stress, if not alienation, in the relationship.

Avoid the cycle altogether. Learn to put on that other set of lenses. It takes patience, but it's not hard to do.

The Reasoning of a Novice

During my early years in Africa I often traveled to new places on Sundays, and the story about the petrol-station attendant recurred with agonizing consistency. I began to conclude that black people were at best highly unreliable, and at worst malicious toward white people (especially this one). It was hard not to believe the worst of them. I could think of no positive explanation for such behavior.

So I constructed a reasoning that at least made some sense to me but was less than complimentary to petrol attendants. This is how it went: In the apartheid system, black people are clearly the oppressed group; they have few creature comforts and often live in severe poverty. For this group of people, the burden of living in oppression and poverty must become unbearable. It is easy to see that an occasional misdirection to a white motorist would ever so slightly tip the scale of injustice and [18/19] provide momentary release from the grip of powerlessness. At least, this was the reasoning I employed in my immature attempts to understand the problem.

These early experiences with cross-cultural conflict had an eroding effect on my view of an entire group of black South Africans. If you cannot trust people to be honest in giving directions, can you trust them in any sphere? Since I was unable to understand the cultural dynamics of this group of people, conflict led me into suspicion and distrust. It was not an intentional or even conscious process, but seemed to unfold quite naturally from the accumulating evidence. Over time, my observations took on the appearance of being factual.

Eventually, I realized my behavior was a result of the virus that resides in all of us. It is called prejudice, and when it infects large parts of the person, it properly falls in the category of racism. The biblical name for it is sin.

Ambiguity, Confusion and the Workings of the Mind

The mind naturally seeks to understand conflict situations, even minor ones. When facts are not immediately forthcoming to explain ambiguous situations, the mind tends to fill in the blanks. That is, we supply our own data to explain the situation. The fatal flaw is that we provide the understanding from our cultural frame of reference, not from the cultural frame of reference of the other person, or the situation in which the conflict exists.

The Western mind finds particular delight in providing answers to questions. An unanswered question is scandalous, so the mind quickly supplies its own answer from its own form of logic, its own cultural assumptions and its own value system. Westerners with a limited ability to tolerate ambiguity, suspend judgment and seek understanding from within other cultures create conflict situations where there are none and turn small conflicts into large ones.

I was feeling quite justified in judging black people in South Africa as uninformed, irresponsible, deceptive or malicious toward whites. Eventually I encountered similar situations in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) and Swaziland. The evidence now suggested the problem was more pervasive than just black people in South Africa.

Generalizations came so easily. So did stereotypes. Increasingly I was inclined to mistrust black people in South Africa, maybe anywhere. Suspicion feeds suspicion, and I began to notice only the "facts" that confirmed my emerging convictions. Before long I was failing to distinguish between the facts and my interpretation of the facts. They conveniently became one and the same. Yet what I saw as fact was radically affected by the cultural lenses I wore.

Most of this process is just below conscious level, but discernible to the alert and informed person. Unfortunately, at a certain point the process becomes self-perpetuating, on automatic pilot as it were. A measure of security comes when I know which "box" a person fits into, because then I know how to treat him or her. I do not need to get acquainted with the person before I judge him or her. At that point I have begun to treat people like objects and no longer see each one as a unique, esteemed human being designed by God and worthy of my individualized and respectful attention.

How We Fill In the Blanks

Social scientists have discovered an interesting behavior that tends to arise in situations of ambiguity or conflict. As I have already mentioned, when someone does something that we do not understand, and an explanation is not quickly forthcoming, we actually provide our own explanation. We fill in the blanks, so to speak. So when I was confused by the directions from the petrol attendant and no explanation was available to alleviate my confusion, I made up my own interpretation of the facts.

But here is the curious part. The interpretation we provide virtually always attributes a negative characteristic and motivation to the other person. We rarely give people the benefit of the doubt when they do something we don't understand. Since the Western mind needs immediate closure to ambiguities, Westerners are especially quick to attach some deficiency to the other person whenever confusion arises. You can easily see how this creates conflict when there was none, or aggravates minor conflicts into major ones.

Learning from Mistakes

In the case of the various black people who gave me errant directions, I made several mistakes. First, I confused the facts with my interpretation of the facts. It was fact that they often gave inaccurate information. What was not fact was that it happened because of some negative feature of their character or motivation. This was a premature conclusion on my part. It fulfilled my need for immediate answers, but did an injustice to the people because it was a prejudice.

Second, because my culture had taught me to make quick decisions and judgments, I was not able to keep my mind open to culturally appropriate explanations. Nor was I inclined to seek them. Once I made a judgment in the matter, my mind closed. And then it reopened only to receive data that confirmed my inaccurate conclusion.

Third, my interpretation of the facts was heavily biased by my own cultural values. I was prone to supply answers that made the most sense in my cultural context. While this provided me with a certain measure of satisfaction, it only delayed the point at which I would need to deal with reality. An awareness of reality came when I began to learn about the Africans' culture and see, little by little, through their cultural lenses. More and more the answers I needed were supplied from their frame of reference and accurately reflected the true character and motivation of the people.

Fourth, once I felt justified in my conclusion, I unconsciously looked for further data to support it. At the same time, I failed to take note of data that could have contradicted or modified my conclusion. So I was stuck with a false conclusion for years. Conclusions and judgments seem to have a built-in permanence, even perpetuation, so we need to exercise extreme caution when making them.

These four mistakes can yield devastating results over the long term. By far the worst result is a diminished view of people and an inflated view of one's self—indicating an attitude of superiority. This emergence of superiority marks the end of trust, not in an absolute sense, but in terms of authentic fellowship with other members of the body of Christ.

If this kind of mindset can develop through a series of circumstances and misinterpretations surrounding something as simple as getting directions from petrol attendants, then it can be repeated in multitudes of other situations with unnerving ease.

This Book's Purpose and Scope

In our global village, cultures and racial groups are increasingly bumping into each other, causing misunderstanding and conflict. Cultural differences, coupled with everyone's natural tendency to "do it my way," make conflict inevitable. This means the ability to understand and respond wisely to conflict becomes a compelling priority for survival, peace and happiness in the emerging world of business, travel and mission.

Worldwide, cross-cultural interactions multiply daily through increased business transactions, deployment of military personnel, missionary activity, study abroad and tourism. The United States and many other countries are on the threshold of becoming nations of minorities. Boards, salespeople, executives, church staffs and mission agencies are forced to deal with cultural diversity and the inevitable misunderstandings that come from our different frames of reference.

One thing is certain: it is not business as usual. The rules each individual, as well as each culture, uses to manage conflict are not the same as other individuals and groups were taught to use. Each assumes its own rules are superior. Therein lies the first problem. Each is largely unaware of the rules by which it tries to manage conflict. Therein lies [20/21]the second problem. Each culture has an

intricate network of values that support the rules people use to handle conflict, so that understanding of these differences is far more complex than one first supposes. Therein lies the third problem.

Most cross-cultural conflicts are not intentional. Most are inadvertent, occurring because underlying cultural values and corresponding rules are not understood. What is surprising is not that we have so many conflicts but that, given everyone's cultural centeredness, there are not more conflicts.

This book is intended to clarify issues in intercultural and interracial conflict, to provide insights on the different ways people of various cultures handle conflict, to evaluate these according to Scripture and to provide practical guidelines for (1) helping us live more harmoniously with our cultural differences, (2) developing a positive strategy for dealing with conflict and (3) communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ more effectively and ministering the nurturing grace of God.

Conflict Management & Resolution

Unit 2

What Obstacles do Christian Leaders Face in Handling Conflict?



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Unit 2 – What Obstacles do Christian Leaders Face in Handling Conflict?

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Readings:

Duane Elmer. *Cross cultural Conflict*
 James P. Osterhaus, *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict*
 Genesis Chapters 43-45

Learning Objectives:

- Identify obstacles that hinder Christian leaders handling conflict.
- Analyze case studies in which conflict management was made more difficult
- Conduct inductive Bible study to discover Biblical instruction on the subject.
- Describe three core obstacles that hinder conflict management
- Provide suggestions how to deal with these obstacles as a paradigm for handling obstacles.
- List some representative obstacles for individual student research.

Introduction

Having established the notion in Unit 1 that conflict is not always a negative thing, that good things can actually be derived because of it, we now turn to a study of some of the factors that hinder handling conflict and that stand in the way of resolution. It is important to identify these as you prepare to deal with conflict in subsequent units.

People too often leave Christian work because of their disappointments and inability to resolve relational problems. We are convinced of the need for this course in order to prevent good people from leaving the work to which they feel God called them. We believe the key to unity and harmony among Christians and in our ministries is to learn how to manage conflict more effectively so that Christian work around the world will improve.

Resolution is not easy and it will not always happen. There are times when we cannot see our way through a conflict. If and when that happens, we have suggestions in this course how separation can happen with minimal negative fallout. We are instructed to live at peace with all men as best we can (Hebrews 12:4).

In reality, given our humanity, we fail and others fail. Situations get out of hand, and we sometimes choose a divergent path from others that too often seems antagonistic or at least competitive. Sometimes choices like these result in temporary separation while at other times the change is for a lifetime. How we can do this in a healthy way will be discussed in Unit 6.

In any event we find ourselves walking away from relationships and situations that can be resolved if we have the right tools. This course will help you determine how to make a difference in conflict situations and change yourself. Repeating the same pattern in conflict is very common, only the players change.

Think with us about your conflicts in life. Who are the people with whom you have bad relationships? How did the ruptured friendship happen? How did you feel? How did they feel? Do you see any similarities?

In the box below (#1) list the name(s) of person(s) with whom you are experiencing conflict. Next to the name write one-word descriptions of the nature of the conflict. Note the example in the box.

Answer Box # 1

Name	Nature of Conflict	Your Feeling	His/Her Feeling
E.g. Joseph	personality conflict	Anger/Confusion	Indifferent
1.			
2.			
3.			



You might be wondering why we asked you to list names in the box above. We know this might have been a difficult thing for you to do. It's highly personal. And putting things in print makes one vulnerable. However the positive outcomes for doing the exercise

outweigh, in our judgment, any negative fallout that might result. Putting things on paper help us move away from denial and move toward transparency and transparency is an important first step toward handling conflict.

Our natural impulse is often to sweep things under the rug, hide them from others and ourselves; an ostrich effect. Have you observed this huge and powerful creature? A moment of fear and he seeks a hole into which he can thrust his head thereby thinking the danger has past or that it simply doesn't exist.

So, if you weren't convinced before and decided not to do the exercise please reconsider and go back to box #1 and list the names of people or perhaps situations and try to identify it's nature, your feelings about the person(s) or situation(s) and the feelings of the subject(s). We think this will help you move toward managing conflict rather than avoiding it.

Now, let's return to the subject of establishing patterns which was the purpose for doing the exercise in box#1. An obvious and not uncommon illustration is that of a woman who marries four different times and finds herself abused, alone, and the victim of insecure and abusive men four times! Why did this pattern repeat itself so frequently? We want to learn to avoid the repetition of damaging patterns, often established in early childhood, that bring us to the same sort of conflicts time and again throughout life.

Think about it?

Are there instances of conflict in your life or ministry that have become patterns and seem to repeat themselves?

Let's pause here for a moment and reflect upon instances or events of conflict in your life and ask yourself if there is a pattern involved. List any patterns you think of in the box below. An example is given to help you think of patterns.

Answer Box # 2

E.g. I find myself in conflict with my supervisor often and tend to react in anger and hurt. I have changed jobs 3 times.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



learning

Before going further in this unit take 30 minutes or less and go to the Reading section of this unit and read James Osterhaus, *Thriving through Ministry Conflict* selection beginning on page **.



reading

Finished? Good! You'll be asked to interact with these pages in Osterhaus a bit later but for now proceed with the negative things you say about our self.

What are the negative things you say over and over again in your mind? Do you use the word "they" when you talk about the congregation, the board, or you co-workers? Do you feel you are on a different side and not teaming together? Can you see anything happening now that happened to you as a child, or a young adult? Try to identify patterns you repeat in life.

There is no easy formula for handling conflict and there is certainly no one model that will work in all situations. We'll discuss five models or paradigms for handling conflict in Unit 4 and these represent some helpful approaches. Our purpose however, is not to provide an overview of the literature or give you foolproof strategies on this subject. Rather we will distill a few relevant models to help you work through different approaches to deal with conflict.

Bible Study:

Some moments in life are family moments and very often these moments are full of conflict. No one else outside the family unit can fully understand the dynamics of family tension and stress. We have a glimpse into family conflict in the story of Joseph and brothers. What Joseph and his family experienced is truly amazing and there are important lessons to learn for the observant person.

The essence of the story we want to emphasize here begins in Genesis 43 and proceed through chapter 45.

Let's pause here as you go to your Bible and read Genesis 43-45. Please take notes in the margin to the right of this page. You should note anything you find along the lines of conflict, how it happened, what caused it and how it was resolved. We suggest that you read these chapters three times. The *first* time through you should read quickly trying to get the themes of the story in your mind and to get a general understanding of the flow of the narrative. Your *second* time through read more slowly taking note of the characters, who they are and their respective roles in the conflict. The *third* time through focus on specific issues.

Finished? Good. Now let's proceed with some focused analysis. Go to box #3 below and answer the questions listed there. You may keep your Bible open and be sure to refer to the notes you have taken.



bible study

Answer Box # 3

1. What do the following words tell you about Joseph? "...*Joseph made himself known to his brothers.*"
2. Why do you think Joseph was no longer fearful of his brothers? Can you think of any reasons for his confidence other than the influential and powerful position he held?
3. How would you characterize Joseph's feeling toward his family?



application

Answer Box # 3

4. Joseph as a young man was proud and arrogant. What do you observe about his opinion of himself in this text? Do you see any change from his former opinion?
5. What relationship do you see between Joseph's former trials and difficulties and the way he treated his brothers in this story?
6. How would you characterize the relationship between Joseph and his brothers at the end of the story?

**application**

The story of Joseph and his brothers is full of obstacles in managing conflict. In addition to the observations you made in the boxes above we see intrigue, pride, disloyalty, anger/rage, violence, deception, lack of integrity, lying, arguing, jealousy and more. All of these are representative hindrances to managing conflict. Did you notice as you did your Bible study that this chain of conflicting circumstances began with pride, proceeded to intrigue and manipulation and almost ended, except for the Grace of God, in the disintegration of the family? We'll talk more about that in detail below but for now let's observe a few lessons we learned as we did this study:

Here are a few lessons we can learn from the story of Joseph and his brothers.

- We learn that God can give us confidence to be transparent when others are covering things up.
- We learn that when we know God and walk with Him we no longer need anyone to prove to us who we are.
- Joseph knew who he was in God. He had lived through many trials from the top to the bottom of life.
- He was confident and was transparent before his brothers who sinned against him.
- Joseph desired a restored relationship with his family.
- He humbled himself to make that happen for him and for his father and brother, but he included the other brothers who had sinned and offended him.
- We learn that our great pain can contribute to someone else's deliverance, even someone who put us in harms way.

This is how families find healing. Someone in the family needs to be a hero. Someone needs to look at him or herself, know himself or herself in God, and take on a position that will bring healing to a family.

God is in the process of restoring personal relationships, families and organizations. This is His work in the world. We may think it is our ministry, our work, but we don't always realize that it is through relationships that He works. If you have sin in your heart against

someone else, it is God’s work to bring that to a place of restoration. It may take a long time, as in the life of Joseph, but God has a plan you can count on it.

Joseph’s forgiveness is not in word only, but in deed. He takes action. Nothing can ignite a family feud like some old memory that has never been healed. Once that old injury is exposed a big family feud can be ignited like a forest fire. Forgiveness will be taken up in Unit 3 in more detail but we take note of its significance in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Forgiveness takes on an importance that is uncommon to human kind. Notice the changes in Joseph’s character and in his relationships:

1. Joseph became a peacemaker even though he was the one offended! After God did His work in Joseph, he became mature, stable, and wise enough to bring peace.
2. Joseph had compassion on his enemies!
3. He knew the family secrets better than anyone and yet he did not capitalize on them to get revenge against his brothers when the opportunity came to him.
4. He had many years to prepare his heart. When the opportunity came, he was ready.
5. Joseph became humble through the experience. Do you think there is any connection between what Joseph experienced in prison and the injustice that got him there and how he reacted to his brothers?

Answer Box # 4

Take some time in prayer and personal reflection now.

Is there any situation in your immediate or extended family in need for reconciliation?

Does God want you to be the peacemaker Joseph was?

Is God putting a burden for another close family on your heart, where HE wants you to get involved in resolving this conflict?

What will you do about it?



application

We turn now from the story of Joseph to our story about Rajah, Mary, Joseph and Hilda.

Case Study: Rajah and Mary Revisited

Do you recall the story of Rajah and Mary and the younger couple, Joseph and Hilda, whom they hired to work in the international office of a small Christian organization? Let’s revisit them and see if there is something more to be learned.

As the story developed we find that Mary did resign the organization. She continued to be involved however, because of the location of the office, and because of her knowledge, her relationship with other staff, and some on-going and not yet completed projects.

Time passed and a safe emotional distance was established between the two couples. Rajah and Mary backed off from the relationship giving Joseph and Hilda freedom to develop their ideas and plans. More funds were made available for their projects. Everything was done by the organization to help them succeed.

At one point Hilda came to apologize to Mary and in the apology explain herself. Hilda talked, cried, and seemed to take advantage of the situation to gain pity and excuse her actions. Then she asked Mary to express herself also. Mary was reticent but decided to cooperate and asked two questions. Asking these questions was entirely too threatening to Hilda, so after leaving Mary's house, Hilda went again to the CEO with her complaints. She said that Mary's questions were actually criticisms and that Mary was causing more trouble.

The CEO made an appointment with Rajah and Mary to discuss the issue and requested that no pressure be put on Hilda. Mary concluded from the conversation with the CEO that the CEO would not be able to handle this problem between two women.

It was difficult, but with much prayer and reticence, Mary approached Hilda and said, "Hilda you said you want relationship with me. If so, then you will have to talk to me and work out the relationship with me and stop going to other people. We must work out our problems together, otherwise, we cannot have relationship. I want you to succeed and I will be kind to you but I will not tolerate this behavior." This approach made a difference. This choice on Mary's part set needed boundaries for Hilda. The working relationship improved from that time on.

Think about it?

Answer Box #5

1. Are there areas in your life where you should set boundaries that will help other people treat you with respect? Yes? No? What are they?
2. Have you ever been successful in setting boundaries in the past? If so list them.
3. Have you been unsuccessful in setting boundaries in the past? If so list them.



learning



Read what Reggie McNeil in his latest Leadership Book says about boundaries:

Your Boundaries—or Lack of Them¹

Many spiritual leaders discover that they get into psychological, emotional, and spiritual distress because they have inappropriate boundaries. Boundaries are like fences. They let us know where we end and where the rest of the world picks up. Some leaders have left gates open; some have let the fence be knocked down, and others have never figured out where the fence goes.

Henry Cloud and Steve Townsend¹ have identified four problematic boundary types: compliants, avoidants, controllers, and nonresponsives. Each condition carries a set of potential pitfalls for spiritual leaders, especially if they are unaware of the boundary violation.

Compliants. Compliants are people who allow others to violate their personal boundaries, mainly because they don't want to "hurt others' feelings"—a telltale phrase indicating how compliants inappropriately take on the responsibility of managing other people's emotions. Consequently, compliants have a tough time saying no to people, even when the request for time or attention is out of line or too demanding. Even though compliants may be screaming inside for relief from others' demands, they usually give in and then seethe because of their lost time and energy.

Compliant leaders frequently harbor resentment toward the very people they claim they want to serve and blame others for their distress instead of recognizing that their own internal flaw is causing the problem. Because they fear abandonment or rejection, compliants leave the gate open when it should be shut, then blame others for coming in.

Chloe is the classic compliant. She can't say no, yet she whines incessantly about how others take advantage of her. On the outside she is the consummate servant, always attentive to people's needs. On the inside she is a cauldron of resentment waiting to spill over. Unless she gets a handle on this, she is headed for burnout and bitterness. She will blame others for it, but her burnout will be her own doing.

Many spiritual leaders wrestle with this boundary issue. After all, people go into the ministry to help other people. What they discover is that the needs are enormous and never-ending. If leaders have cracks in their own psychological foundation that they are looking for others to fill (high approval needs, for instance), they are particularly susceptible to compliance issues.

Treatment for compliants involves the twin remedy of awareness (here we are again!) and accountability. Compliants have to come out of denial and own the dysfunction as their own. They have to quit blaming others for their dilemma and realize it is their own needs and fears that are the problem. Since this issue didn't develop overnight, it won't go away overnight. Leaders who make themselves accountable to others often ask for help in creating space for themselves and in establishing new work rhythms that include scheduled time when the leader is unavailable to others.

Avoidants. Avoidants evidence another set of boundary problems. In effect, they shut the gates when they should let others in; these leaders withdraw under pressure. Early family-of-origin experiences may lie at the root of the avoidant reaction. They may have had some experience of psychological pain that taught them an unfortunate lesson: keep other people out. Avoidants are very hard to help because they keep people, even those who want to help them, at a distance. They keep people out in a number of ways: by verbal

¹ Reggie McNeal, *Practicing Greatness*, Jossey-Bass, 2006

gate-shutting (cutting off conversation with a curt "I'm fine"), by creating emotional distance (keeping their guard up), and even by physically withdrawing (from keeping the door shut to being physically absent). Spiritual leaders with this boundary problem wind up lonely and isolated, lacking the emotional and psychological support they need in a leadership role that places huge emotional and psychological demands on them. As a result, some leaders who fail to recognize and address this boundary issue crater. Their burnout may be either explosive or implosive.

Eugene grew up as an only child of aging parents. Doted on and coddled, he developed high expectations of how others should treat him. Yet he never learned to play with other kids and was emotionally distant from his parents (they used material things as a poor substitute for emotionally engaging their son). Eugene became a loner. But he was a very competent leader, so his ministry experience for almost two decades was very successful. As his church grew, Eugene found the pressure getting to him. He withdrew more and more, eventually becoming an absentee leader. Those who saw what was happening tried to help. He not only refused their offers of assistance, he withdrew from anyone who had "found him out." When his board began to raise the issue of his absences, he refused to be accountable. He finally exploded in a board meeting and quit. The sad thing was, some of his best friends were on the board. Eugene further alienated the very people who were his best promise for help.

Leaders with this boundary issue are hard to help, because that's the problem—being hard to reach and to help is the issue. It takes particularly committed friends who are willing to be patient and persistent in breaching the leader's wall. Occasionally, in a time of failure, the leader is open to coaching. This window of opportunity should not be ignored by those who can provide emotional and spiritual support.

Controllers. Controllers are people who don't respect others' boundaries and, in some cases, don't even realize that boundaries exist. Controllers come in two varieties: aggressive and passive. Aggressive controllers hull their way in where they shouldn't and feel they have a right to be there. Spiritual leaders who invade others' privacy or who are abusive with their spiritual authority fall into this category. They tell people how to think and how to live, and they even see others' money as something they are entitled to. In extreme form these are cult leaders who manipulate and abuse their followers. Passive controllers achieve their goals indirectly through guilt and manipulation, deceiving their followers into doing their bidding while letting them think it is their own choice. They are experts at hooking people at their points of vulnerability.

Alan is a bully. He brings people on board his staff leadership team by wooing them with high salaries and promises of advancement. He then manages them through intimidation, reminding them what they owe him and how hard it would be for them to find another job as good-paying as this. Alan is hardly subtle in his controlling ways. He's the aggressive type.

Sandra, soft-spoken and sweet as honey, is never someone you'd pick as a controller. That's because she's a passive type. Her favorite ploy is to use personal praise to control people. She heaps such praise on people that they find it hard to disagree with her or to turn her down when she makes requests for their time and attention. In this way she takes advantage of others' goodwill. When she senses people pulling away, she pours it on even thicker.

Controllers usually have to be very forcefully challenged in order to change. Unless they come to grips with their lack of respect for other people and with the sources of their need for control, they will continue their controlling ways.

Nonresponsives. Nonresponsives are leaders who have learned to deal with boundary issues by not responding to others' needs or problems. They have so walled themselves off that they are not drawn to alleviate others' suffering. Ministry roles don't usually

attract nonresponsives, so the number of spiritual leaders with this true condition is fairly rare. If they do get into spiritual leadership, they usually don't last very long.

A clear exception is the case where nonresponsives are so insulated by an organization that the people they lead are basically unaware of their shortcoming (as, for example, when an unresponsive leader is surrounded by highly caring and responsive staff). People unmoved by others' needs typically require significant psychological coaching or therapy.

Clearly, boundary issues are serious matters for leaders. Self-aware leaders realize that these issues affect many different aspects of their leadership, such as time management, leadership focus, ministry intentionality, health of the church or organizational culture, appropriate responses to conflict, and genuine responsiveness to people's needs. Absent this awareness, the leader is left vulnerable to a variety of derailments, from being jerked around by others' expectations to being so highly controlling that they lose their own emotional presence to being uncaring about others. The price to pay for unexamined boundaries is too high.

Think about it?

Answer Box # 6

What boundary – type are you?

How does it influence your way to deal with conflict?



learning

Boundaries are only one set of obstacles. To deal exhaustively with all the obstacles to managing conflict would take several volumes. Continuing we will deal here with four other obstacles that we judge to be the most common. We include an expanded list for you the student to select as a final assignment in this unit to work through. The first of the four we will discuss is pride.

Pride

Pride raised its ugly head at the beginning of the human story. You'll recall the serpent's promise that if Eve ate the fruit in the garden that she would become as gods, the inference was that she would become as God. The offer that she become more than God has made her, and her husband, to be was at the very core pride (Genesis 3: 1-7).

Pride as we are using it here is a sense of superiority, a haughty attitude shown by people who believe they are better than others. Of course there is a proper sense of one's own value as a person created by God, one who has intrinsic worth by virtue of our createdness.

Pride is always involved in strongholds, areas of our lives that we find difficult to overcome and that tend to cause us to repeat former failures. It is at the core of all sin. We offer a word of caution that as you seek to restore relationships do not expect that everyone will have the same feelings at the same time. One person might feel great relief while another person will still be processing the experience, as did Joseph's brothers did.

We learn from Scripture that pride is the sin God hates. *"The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil, pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate." Proverbs 8:13*

I recall with inner pain and shame a time when I came face to face with my own pride. I share this experience with reticence but feel that it illustrates what we mean and how it became an important step in our spiritual growth.

Sandi and I went to Thailand in 1966 to serve as missionaries. We purchased a used motorcycle to get around with our two small boys. The motorcycle served us well in Bangkok but then we were assigned to do village evangelism and medical work in a distant province on the Thai/Laotian/Cambodian border. Another vehicle was necessary to do this work and so an older Land Rover jeep became available for our use. However, the jeep engine needed extensive repairs. Local mechanics were not able to do the work nor did I have the tools or technical know-how to do it.

An American military mechanic assigned to a nearby airbase said he would rebuild the engine for us. Tom towed the land rover to Ubon province where we lived and parked it under a large mango tree in our yard. Aside from the ants and the soggy ground it was the only shady place for Frank to do the work. For several weeks Frank came to our house in the late afternoons after his work on the base and ate lunch and dinner with us. Frank was a believer but often swore and had a smoking habit. His grammar was poor and he was a member of a different church background than ours.

Frank announced one day after lunch that God had called him to Thailand for this military service so that he could pray for us to receive the Holy Spirit. We were surprised and tried to be polite but our actions said, "No thank you." Frank continued to work on the vehicle and got it running and we were very grateful. But Frank left Thailand without the satisfaction of being the one to have been the source of our "being filled with the Holy Spirit." He seemed to have fallen into depression before he left and we didn't see him much. This confirmed to us that our assessment of his spiritual life had been accurate.

Soon after he finished the work on the land rover, our mission doctor came to our province to hold clinics in the villages with us. We told Dr. John about Frank's comment and laughingly mentioned that he wanted to minister the Holy Spirit to us.

Dr. John was not only an excellent doctor trained in the treatment of Hanson's Disease (Leprosy), he was also a friend, co-worker and a man of God. That evening during devotions Dr. John prayed, "Lord, teach Tom and Sandi how to submit to a lesser brother."

These words, gently and sincerely spoken in prayer to God overwhelmed us with sadness and grief as we recognized our pride in that relationship. Frank was a man who gave much to us and he wanted to give so much more, but we were too proud to take him seriously, let him pray for us and fulfill his mission at the same time.

Think about it?

Answer Box # 7

How does this story make you feel? Does it cause you to remember some event in your life in which you recognize pride? Please describe that event and your feelings about it.

What is God trying to teach you about pride?



application

This is why God must humble us. We find it difficult to humble ourselves as He asks us to do. We cannot even humble ourselves before God not to mention a "lesser brother."

When we are wronged, we can be sure pride is involved. When we wrong others, we can be sure pride is involved. When we are offended, mostly it is our pride that is hurt. We believe we deserve better. We often feel we should be treated better. We are not prone to listen to someone we do not respect. The net effect of pride makes it difficult if not impossible for us to learn because our hearts become hard and prideful and we reject God's communication to us unless He does it only in ways we can accept and understand. These are tendencies we need to avoid. I have since come to believe that God can and often does speak to me through the most unlikely people and events.

We find that people choose to grow cold rather than deal with the pain of riding themselves if of the pride we carry with us. We have a choice, as did Joseph. He had every reason to become bitter, but he chose to deal with his pride, his own pain, his sense of victimization and he saw that God was using it for good. In the end God saved the family because Joseph had integrity, transparency and was able to forgive himself and and others and humble himself.

We too can restore our families if we will deal with our pride. Or we can grow cold and distant and fail to allow God's healing to flow. If we have been offended, let's choose to be like Joseph and be prepared for the day when we can restore others. We don't want to miss what God will do!

Gossip and Slander

Another obstacle that hinders our dealing with conflict is gossip. Indeed conflict seldom develops without the element of gossip.

Good teaching on the subject is preventative in nature, but at the time we seek restoration, healing and resolution, gossip can be

a major factor in keeping things going in the wrong direction.

Gossip is sin but it seems that people who gossip often have no clue that they are doing it or the damage it causes to relationships. For this reason they do not respond to teaching on gossip unless they have a clear understanding what it is.

So, let's begin with a definition. Gossip is speaking about or listening to personal information about someone else, when one or both people are not involved in the problem or the solution. Slander is defaming someone else or speaking about someone with malicious intent.

Gossip is often a long established habit, which keeps us from occupying our time, thoughts and energies in building the Kingdom of God. Gossip is sometimes engaged in with the hope of making ourselves look better or more important in the eyes of the listener. Gossip is power. Information is power. This is not the power of God in our lives and must be curtailed and stopped as quickly as it appears.

A loving and kind approach that is consistent and brings accountability is the best way to deal with gossip.

A Pastor wanted to wipe gossip out of his church. He was right in not tolerating it but he had a very harsh & judgmental attitude toward the people who were gossiping. He did not lead his people, nor did he offer them grace and mercy. He eventually asked three long-term members of the church to leave. It is unlikely that they learned the disciplines needed to control their tongues and the way he handled the situation likely was the introduction of bitterness in the women and self-righteousness in the Pastor.

It's good to know that when we are tempted to gossip we have choices. Here are some options we can consider depending upon the situation.

- When we hear gossip we must urge the person to go directly to the offender with the information.
- If the gossiper is hesitant to approach the person involved, we can offer to go with them and facilitate reconciliation.
- Agreeing with the person who brings the information that you would like accountability to not gossip about the situation. Agree to check on each other to hold to this agreement.
- God hates gossip but he loves the gossiper. None of us are beyond gossip. Men gossip as well as women. Women are more likely to gain inside information, and when it is told to men, they are often willing listeners. They in turn might bring it up at a Board meeting, or in a "mature" fashion that relieves them of the label of a gossiper. Nonetheless, we all need to guard our tongues.
- The more private the information, the more character references and innuendos, the more harmful gossip can be. Victims of gossip do not have an opportunity to explain themselves. A direct encounter is the best way to handle this and all who have gossiped need to be informed of the truth. Gossip stops when someone checks to find out the facts!
- Overcome evil with good. (James 3:6 and Eph 4:29) teach us to speak words of truth and love and to be slow to criticize or acknowledge negatives words about another. By giving grace to the victim as well as the person who speaks gossip, we are peacemakers and we edify the Body of Christ.
- We should be hesitant to believe evil of anyone and we must examine everything carefully; and hold to that which is good. (1 Thess 5:21)
- If there is truth to a matter, or a partial truth, then it must be sorted out and approached in love, knowing that we too have sinned and must seek forgiveness from.

- Do not promote strife among the brothers and sisters. God hates lying, false witness, and spreading strife. Gossip is in this category. We must act quickly to reverse the situation when we hear gossip.



application

Think about it!

Answer Box # 8

1. Likely at one time or another you have you been the object of gossip. Select at least one time you've been subjected to gossip. Describe the event briefly here.
2. How do you think you could have responded in a better way?
3. How will you be prepared to handle this better next time?

Manipulation

We are using the term *manipulation* in a negative sense. For our purposes it involves arranging things, people and circumstances in order to promote one's own ideas, and even evil intentions. This can be harmful if there is evil intent, such as manipulating the ballot boxes, manipulating policemen, paying bribes, pressuring people until they have no will to stand up for righteousness. *Exploitation* is another word that describes what we mean.

Manipulation can involve *deception, fraud, lies*, and being a false witness, all of which are simply sub categories for manipulation and as such represent more obstacles to conflict management. A manipulator is convinced they are right and committed to getting their own way at any cost. A manipulative person is usually a big talker, promoting themselves, and charming others.

Flattery is part of manipulation as well. Flattery is complimenting somebody, often excessively or insincerely, in order to get something.

We are warned against using flattery. Not only should we not listen or be influenced by it, we should avoid it. The temptation is to flatter people of high position. To show them great honor with compliments and applause, when it is not honest. Flattery is a sure sign of limited integrity on the part of the one who does it.

Paul warned the Christians in Rome to beware of flattery:

"I appeal to you brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such person do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive." Romans 16:17

I suspect you, as we, have experienced being manipulated. It's not a pleasant experience. One never forgets it. The pain can be deep and lasting and can produce the most difficult forms of conflict.

Please read the following experience that our friends Nobu and Melynda had to deal with.

Nobu and Melynda are examples of a husband and wife who have wonderful attitudes in the face of ungodly manipulation.

Nobu is a Japanese citizen who works for a large Japanese shipping company. The company sent Nobu to work in a regional office in the Philippines and while there he met and married beautiful Melynda a Filipina woman in Manila.

Later they became Christians and moved to Japan. Nobu and Melynda found it difficult to live as a bi-racial couple in Japan so when an assignment was available in Thailand they gladly volunteered and moved to Bangkok with there with their two children. Nobu was well-loved by the Thai employees. Because of his gracious Christianity he became an outstanding and productive leader in his company.

Melynda begged Nobu to help her save money for a family vacation trip to an international Christian conference to be held in another country. So Nobu applied for vacation dates that would allow the family to attend the conference. Typical of a Japanese company, there is lots of control, even on the personal vacation time of the employees. Nobu's supervisor did not approve of Nobu using his vacation time in this manner. In fact he threatened to demote Nobu if he insisted on this type of vacation.

Nobu and Melynda prayed and made the choice to go to the conference even taking their children out of school. Sure enough, his supervisor kept his word and Nobu was demoted. He was transferred back to Japan

Did Nobu and Melynda regret their decision? The Christian Conference was outstanding and uplifting and the family joyfully accepted the consequences of their choice.

Although living in Japan was more difficult in some ways, their radiant testimony and especially Nobu's loving leadership as a husband, impressed and influenced the Japanese church and community.

How might you apply this lesson to a tough situation you face?

Think about it?

Answer Box #9

1. What do you think? Did Nobu and Melynda do the right thing in taking their children out of school?
2. How do you think God blessed Nobu and Melynda even when they didn't get all they wanted and had to move back to Japan?
3. What situation of manipulation are you currently facing?
4. What have you learned in this unit that will help you to deal with this kind of conflict?

**application****Exercise**

Let's pause before going on to our final conflict category and do a little exercise in managing conflict in an ordinary everyday situation. Read the situation below, taking notes in the margin to the right of our paper. The idea here is to project yourself as best you can into the situation asking yourself how best to resolve the impending conflict taking place in the bank.

Yesterday I sat in a public waiting area in the bank while a mother with two little girls was making a transaction. Her two little girls were fighting over the magazines placed there for the customers to read while waiting for a clerk.

One little girl said, "This one is mine." The other girl said, "No I got it first, it is mine."

I said, "Just a minute girls, I can help you." They were surprised as was their mother. I continued, "First of all, these magazines are not ours, but we can look at them."

Addressing the older one who seemed more reasonable I said, “Now, you get this magazine to look at. I looked at the younger one while she enfolded a magazine wadding it up in her arms, and said, “I’ll help you look at this one while your Mommy is busy” As I rescued the magazine from her little arms.

I proceeded to point out a picture of a “Mommy” chopping vegetables, and asked the child a few questions. I then was called to take my turn and left the magazine on the chair for her to continue.

Finished reading the story? Ok, go to the box below and interact with the questions there. There is no right or wrong answer so please don’t look for one. The idea here is for you to consider an everyday situation armed with the information you have gained to this point. What have you learned that you can apply here?

Answer Box # 10

What method did I use to bring resolution to this potential conflict between the girls and embarrassment to their mother and the customers in the bank?

What other methods could have been used? Was this one best?

Why did the people involved trust me?

Try practicing this with someone else today. Pick strangers or family and try applying some of the methods in resolving simple conflicts.



application

I hope you did the exercise in box # 10 before going on because I'm going to give you the resolution to this conflict.

This situation was resolved in less than a minute. I was able to bring a solution because of a skill I had learned. Also, I was not emotionally involved which helped me think clearly and be helpful.

I believe most people WANT conflict resolution but they don't want to give up something they want to have relationship.

This is especially true if they have rather good character training and have been taught a sense of right from wrong. The conflict comes with our selfish natures, our pride, our fears. So with good leadership people respond.

Children respond and feel cared for when a pleasant person who gives a sense of knowing the solution, will lead them to conflict resolution. In this case, the Mother was distracted, the girls were competitive, which was likely their frequent behavior pattern with each other. Sibling rivalry began in the first family on earth. It continues today into most adult family relationships.

The underlying problem is greater than the symptoms. This conflict was resolved in a win-win result. It was only a beginning to solving the deeper causes of the problem. In many cases, especially with strangers, this is all you can do.

In this case, each child was heard. Each child got something she wanted - a magazine. Each child liked the results because they wanted something to do while Mom was busy, and they wanted peace with each other.

In this case, an adult could oversee the problem, manage the conflict, guiding the children to play side-by-side with their own focus can bring unity in individuality.

Culture

We will examine cultural and communications issues more fully in Unit 6 but we can't ignore the centrality of cultural values to conflict management. Indeed, an entire course in the DAI curriculum is dedicated to the study of ethnicity.

Pause for a few moments now and go to Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict*, beginning on page**



Finished? Good! We're hoping the reading of Elmer brought some new insights to you relative to culture. I don't know how you think about culture but there are many perspectives and understandings about it. Some think of culture as a *problem to be overcome* while others are more positive.

Several "God and Culture" positions have been delineated over the years. Paul Tillich was one of the first to talk about a "theology of culture" in his book by that name. Charles Kraft distinguished five basic positions with 4 sub categories to *God and Culture* in his book *Christianity and Culture* (1985). Paul Hiebert, David Hesselgrave, Marvin Mayers and many others have come along with varying approaches.

They range from:

1. God is against culture.
2. God is in culture.
3. God is above culture.
4. God is above but works through culture.

Our purpose in this unit is to focus on the most basic thing about culture and conflict and so our remarks will be limited to this facet of the God and Culture issue. More detail will be given to the first 3 positions in Unit 6 and 7. We'll limit our discussion here to the 4th position.

Now, go back to Elmer and review pages 22-32. What did you learn there? Go to box #11 below and work through the questions there that arise from your reading of Elmer.

Answer Box # 11

1. What did you learn about the *diversity* of human cultures? Was it good? Bad? How do you characterize it?
2. On page 24 Elmer says: "*most conflicts that disrupt our lives grow out of innocent misunderstandings unmet expectations, failure to get all the facts, or minor irritations that fester and become problems.*" Do you agree? Disagree? Explain.
3. What effect does "individualism" have on "unity?"
4. How important are "relationships" to you and your ministry? Do you give the same significance to them as Elmer does on pages 28, 29?

**application**

We see in Elmer a positive regard for cultural diversity. Without being naïve in our understanding about the capacity for human beings to do evil through their cultures, Elmer introduces us to the idea that culture is essentially God's idea. I'd like to clarify that a bit more by saying that the capacity for human culture is God's idea.

We see this implicitly in creation. God spoke (Genesis 1), which means he communicated. He met Adam and Eve in the Garden and communed with them there. He gave them work to do which entailed socialization and Adam and Eve spoke to each other. All in all we can derive from the Creation account in Genesis that God made human beings with the ability to associate with each other and to communicate with each other and all of this is part of the image of God.”

It seems clear then that though human culture can be the source of conflict we prefer to view it as a potential for good instead of seeing it as a problem to be overcome.

Summary & Conclusions:

What have we learned? We’ve reinforced the idea that positive outcomes can derive from situations of conflict. We’ve also learned that there are hindrances to managing conflict. We described four of these: (1) pride, (2) gossip, (3) manipulation and (4) culture. We described culture as potential and not as problem. Joseph and the story how he overcame family conflict illustrates to us from a Biblical perspective how we too can work through conflict toward positive ends.

We turn our attention next in Unit 3 to dealing with forgiveness as the primary step to take before dealing with strategies or methods.

But first go to your **Final Assignment** below.

Final Assignment

Describe an obstacle or hindrance to resolving a situation of conflict that you are presently dealing with.

1. Name the conflict:
2. Describe the obstacle or hindrance that keeps you from resolving or managing the conflict situation.
3. Who are the players (persons) involved in the conflict? What part(s) do they play?
4. What concrete steps can you see you must take to resolve or manage this conflict situation?



application

Readings



The following readings are taken from those previously mentioned textbooks:

Osterhaus, James P, Joseph M. Jurkowski & Todd A. Hahn. *Thriving through Ministry Conflict: Understanding Your Red & Blue Zones*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan. 2005

Elmer, Duane. *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. 1993

We thank the Publishers for granting us permission to integrate the respective chapters of the books in this DAI workbook.

1. James P. Osterhaus, *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict*, pp. 37- 57

Chapter 3: It's All about You

Barry had about half an hour before he needed to leave for Elliott's house, so he decided to swing by home first and say hi to Sophia and his kids. He pulled into his garage and was wiping his feet on the mat inside the mudroom when he heard Sophia and one of his children speaking in tones more intense than normal.

He stepped into the kitchen, and his sixteen-year-old son, Jake, looked up at Barry as if his dad had caught him doing something wrong. "Hi, Dad," Jake mumbled and brushed past Barry and out the door without meeting his father's eyes.

"What's up with him?" Barry asked Sophia after Jake had pulled out of the garage in his old Taurus.

Sophia didn't seem to want to meet Barry's eyes either, but in a moment she looked up. "Aren't you heading over to your friend Elliott's? Maybe I should wait to fill you in until you get back."

"Sophia, you know I can never wait when you say something like that," Barry sighed, leaning against the kitchen counter. "Go ahead, fill me in."

"It's his midquarter report card," said Sophia.

"You mean ..." Barry began.

"Right, not good," Sophia finished. "Neither English nor history is better, and biology is actually worse. His biology teacher is saying that she doesn't understand how a kid as bright as Jake can continue to come in unprepared for class assignments and labs."

Barry felt a familiar sinking feeling in his stomach. He turned his back on Sophia, hesitated a moment, and smacked his palm against the laminate countertop. "What is up with that kid?" he exploded, smacking the counter again. "How many times do we have to warn him to work harder, to be more serious and committed? What do we have to do? We've grounded him, checked his homework like a third 37 grader's parents, bribed him ... the stubborn kid just doesn't get it!" He paused and Sophia just looked at him.

"Well, this time I know what I'm going to do," said Barry, striding across the kitchen toward the refrigerator. "When he gets back from wherever he just went, I am taking the keys to that car and he is going to be stuck here where he will have plenty of time to get his act together, that's what I'm going to do. One way or another, he is going to get his grades up!" Barry popped the top on a Diet Coke, took a too-deep gulp, and looked at Sophia with a determined glare, trying not to cough as the carbonated soda found its way to the back of his throat.

"Are you finished yet?" asked Sophia, with a half-smile on her face. "Before we start refitting the basement as a torture chamber for Jake, maybe we should think through this a bit first and try to figure out what is really going on."

"Look, honey," replied Barry, "we know what is going on. Jake is slacking off in his homework and commitment to his classes. And we know what's going to happen. His grades really are starting to matter for college admissions, and if he doesn't watch out, he won't be able to get into any college at all."

"Barry, I know this is serious. But let's not lose perspective. The fact is that what we've tried so far—punishment, grounding, badgering— hasn't worked. Maybe we should try a different strategy."

Unable to contain himself, Barry cut Sophia off. "Why should we change? It's Jake that needs to change. He just needs to apply himself, work harder, stop defying us and his teachers, or he's not going to be able to get into college, which you and I both know will put a severe monkey wrench in his future success!"

"Look," Barry continued, "I am not going to let that happen. That is not going to happen to Jake and to us. He is smart enough to make good grades, and he will. When I was his age, I played sports just like he does and I still got good grades! Maybe the problem is that band he's in. We'll have to take that away along with the car. I will do whatever it takes."

Barry turned away in disgust and muttered, "I'm sick of hearing those drums banging in the basement all night anyway, and the howling of that electric guitar. Come to think of it, the basement already sounds as if there is a torture chamber down there!"

Sophia dried her hands on a dishtowel and threaded the towel through the refrigerator door handle. "Barry, I am as frustrated as you are. I don't know why Jake isn't working harder to get his grades up. You and I both know that he is a smart kid. I want him to do better too. But I don't think further punishment and pressure is going to help, because it hasn't been working so far."

"You're wrong, Sophia," Barry replied. "The fact of the matter is that I, I mean we, haven't been firm enough. If we had been more firm at the outset, we could have gotten Jake back on the right track before all of this started spinning out of control. But I've learned my lesson. Jake is going to start trying harder and doing better, and I will be as resolved and firm as I have to be to make sure of it."

"No matter what, right, Barry?" asked Sophia. "No matter the consequences or long-term effects?"

"Don't put words in my mouth, Sophia. You know what I mean. I'm not trying to dictate Jake's life, but I am going to make sure that while he is in my house, he is going to meet certain standards, and one of those is effort in school. I'm not trying to be a tyrant, but I am trying to protect our values as a family, which is bigger than any one person."

There was a silence of a few moments as Sophia weighed her next words carefully.

"Barry, I am going to say something that may be hard for you to hear, but I think I need to say it. You know how you talk about Jim Grendell, how in the church he is ruthless about his goals and ideas, how nothing can get in his way?"

"Sophia, what does Jim Grendell have to do with this? That's the church, this is the fam—"

"Honey, let me finish," Sophia interjected. "I know how frustrating dealing with Jim is for you, how his stubbornness makes you so mad, and how you feel like he is more than willing to steamroll anyone and anything in his path."

"Right, but I still don't see what this has to do with—"

"Barry, what I am trying to tell you is that sometimes I feel the way with you that you feel with Jim. I feel like sometimes you are inflexible and that you will take no prisoners in making sure everything turns out the way you want it to turn out."

Barry took a step back as if Sophia had slapped him. His face turned red, and to his surprise he felt tears spring up in his eyes. Angry tears.

"You can't mean, how can you say ..." he sputtered.

Pausing a second and aligning his words more carefully, he continued. "You know the real problem here, Sophia? The problem is that you are too easy on Jake. You have always been too easy on the kids. And maybe even a deeper problem is that you don't support me when I am trying to give the kids discipline and structure and tough love. You want to know what's really wrong? It's that we are not consistent with Jake. We send him two different messages, you and I. And the message you send him undercuts my message and is frankly the biggest reason why we find ourselves in this mess with Jake."

Snatching his keys off of the kitchen counter, Barry headed out the mudroom door to his car. Just before leaving, he turned around once more. "Sophia, the problem is not that I'm like Jim Grendell. God knows, I have my faults, but being like that man is not one of them. If you want to know the problem, you better take a look at the way you coddle Jake and fail to support me." Barry spoke this final sentence slowly, pausing after each word for emphasis.

"And one more thing, Sophia, comparing me to Jim Grendell is the cheapest shot you have ever thrown my way." And then Barry was gone.

FOR HALF OF THE TRIP TO ELLIOTT'S HOUSE, Barry replayed his conversation with Sophia in his head, unconsciously speaking out loud. Then he caught himself and fell silent, spending the remaining fifteen minutes in the car seething in silence at the unfairness of Sophia's ambush.

Seconds after Elliott had opened his front door, he touched Barry's shoulder for a split second. "Rough day at the office, Barry?" he asked.

"No, the office was fine, Elliott," said Barry, moving quickly from the foyer to the sanctuary of the brown couch in Elliott's study, on which he fell heavily. "The problem was home, when I stopped by for a few minutes before coining out here."

"What happened?" Elliott asked.

"It's Jake's grades again," said Barry. "The kid just won't improve his effort in school. And now this is coming between Sophia and me. I don't know why she won't support me in holding Jake accountable."

"You know what, Elliott? She actually compared me to Jim Grendell. She said I act at home like he acts at church. Can you believe that?" Barry's question wasn't really in search of an answer, so Elliott remained silent for a long moment while Barry tried to get his breathing under control.

"Do you want to talk about it, Barry?" Elliott asked finally.

"You know what, no, Elliott. I don't have the energy. But thanks. Anyway it doesn't have anything to do with what we have been talking about." Barry sat up and fished a legal pad from his briefcase.

"I've got the assignment you gave me, keeping track of the ways in which I behave as a Red Zone leader and as a Blue Zone leader."

"Okay," Elliott said, with a hesitance that Barry didn't catch. "Let's talk about that then."

Barry flipped over the top page of his legal pad. "To be honest, I couldn't really list a lot of Blue Zone behaviors. Basically, I really do love and serve the people on the staff and in the congregation. I try to encourage them, and I spent some time this week with Stephanie, our youth ministry intern, who is a really needy young woman with a lot of emotional problems who looks at me as some kind of father figure. I'm not sure she should even be in seminary or interning at the church, but I really tried to be patient and empathetic with her, even though it really cut into my time."

Barry looked up from the paper and glanced at Elliott, who nodded at him to continue.

"In the board meeting last Monday, Jim Grendell and a couple of his cronies were harping about something totally off the agenda, and I tried really hard not to let it get to me and to keep from Red Zoning, and I mostly succeeded.

"You asked me to take note of Red Zone behaviors as well, and I did find some. I got really upset when the small groups coordinator didn't get me the recent reports on numbers in the small groups on time. I needed those numbers for planning and budgeting purposes, but I still probably overreacted. But I think mostly because the small groups coordinator is just not doing a very good job.

"And when I came back from my meeting with the youth intern, distracted and with a pile of work to do, I snapped at my assistant. I guess I was taking out my frustration on her a little bit."

Barry fell silent and gave Elliott space to ask a question. "How about at home, Barry? Did you find examples of Red Zone and Blue Zone behavior there?"

"I know you said to look for that," Barry replied. "But the principles seemed to apply more to work than to home. The behaviors seemed easier to spot there, and I didn't have a lot of emotional energy to work on translating the Red Zone, Blue Zone concepts into my family life."

"Is that pretty much what you came up with, Barry?" asked Elliott. Barry nodded and Elliott leaned back in his leather wingback chair and sat in silence for enough time that Barry began to grow uncomfortable.

Just as Barry was about to break the silence, Elliott leaned forward. "Barry, first let me say that I am glad you had the guts to tackle the assignment. Not everyone is willing to go that far, to put their ankles into the deep water. But you did, and I commend you for that."

Before Barry had time to feel pleased with himself, Elliott continued. "That said, Barry, I find that your examples have a couple of common themes.

"The first is that they are superficial. They did not even begin to scratch the surface. To your credit, you have begun to grasp the difference between life in the Red Zone and life in the Blue Zone, but I had hoped your understanding would be a bit deeper.

"Of course, that's my fault," Elliott added quickly. "I should have done a better job anchoring those concepts in your mind and heart."

"The second thing I noticed is that every single instance of Red Zone behavior you saw in yourself was someone else's fault, at least in your telling of the story."

Barry sat upright in indignation. "Elliott, you have to be kidding me! I made it as clear as I could that they were my fault. I snapped at my assistant after an emotionally draining meeting, I overreacted to the small groups coordinator's lateness in turning in the report ... those were my fault."

Elliott wouldn't be deterred. "Right, Barry, but in each instance you tied your Red Zone behavior to someone else's actions. You snapped at your assistant because you had a draining meeting, you snapped at the small groups coordinator because the report was late, and you snapped at Sophia because she was not as supportive of you in the discipline of Jake as you thought she should have been."

"How do you mix Sophia in with the other two?" Barry asked, with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Simply because the Red Zone principles are the same both at home and at work, no matter the context," Elliott answered. "Red Zone behavior has its start in the person who demonstrates the behavior, not in external circumstances. If you are living in the Red Zone, you can expect Red Zone behavior to emerge at the slightest provocation. If you are living in the Blue Zone, you tend to react in a Blue Zone way regardless of external circumstances. The zones are something you carry inside of you."

Barry was thoughtful, silent, so Elliott continued. "Barry, at the outset I told you that you would have to be willing to dive into deep water if you want to understand why the challenges in your life are creating such stress and anxiety. If you will remember, at our last meeting, I told you that the sorts of struggles you were having at the church with Jim were really struggles rooted in yourself. To dive into the deep water of self-understanding and living in the Blue Zone, it is critical that you accept that conflict is always more about us than it is about the other person."

"I know you said that, Elliott," responded Barry. "And I try to remind myself of that. But it is tricky to keep track of. And sometimes it seems a stretch. If what you're saying is right, then even my argument with Sophia today had more to do with me than with her. It even had more to do with me than with the situation, or with Jake. Is that really what you are asking me to believe?"

Elliott simply sat in his chair, silent, but with a penetrating gaze.

"Okay, okay," said Barry, breaking the stare by looking away. "You are saying that, I know. But if that is true, what hope do I have? Do I just have to blame myself for every conflict regardless of how right my point of view may be?"

"Barry, blame is a word we must banish from our discussion of these things," said Elliott with arresting force. "Because if we blame others, we are able to avoid the hard work of taking a look inside, where real change can occur. And if we blame ourselves, we usually fall into a cycle of self-recrimination and guilt which equally prevents real change. These things are not a matter of blame but are a matter of understanding, which leads to change. There is all the difference in the world between those two things."

Elliott stood up and motioned Barry toward the door. "Barry, forgive me, but I have another meeting and I need to prepare for that, but I want to mention one more thing as you are leaving." The two men walked into the foyer.

"What I want to say is that you have a very wise wife in Sophia, and that you should listen well to her. She said that she sometimes experiences you as you experience Jim Grendell, and there is much food for thought there. Your assignment for next time is simply to think about that and ask yourself how that could be, since you detest Jim's behavior so much."

Elliott put his hand on the doorknob to let Barry out, and Barry paused as he started through the door. "That's a tough one, Elliott. I'm not really sure how to begin to answer that, even how to get started thinking about that. Do you have any ideas?"

Elliott smiled just a little. "I do, actually. You might start by meditating on the fact that every time I hear you talk about Jim Grendell, I hear you talking about yourself" Elliott waved and shut the front door.

Barry stood alone on the steps. Why does he end our meetings like that every time? he wondered and turned to begin the long drive home.

CHAPTER 4 Things Fall Apart

Barry had less time than he would have liked to reflect seriously on Elliott's parting statement. There was a meeting of the church board that evening, and Barry knew that he would have to be razor sharp in order to lead the board well through what promised to be a contentious discussion.

When Barry was being recruited to come to First Community, the selection committee made it clear that the most important job of the new pastor was to reach out to the increasing numbers of young families moving into the neighborhoods surrounding the church. During his installation service, Jim Grendell, the head of the committee, reminded Barry in the presence of the congregation of this charge.

"Barry, we have called you here to be the pastor and shepherd to this congregation, but we have also called you so that you can help us reach out to those around us who are not committed to any church. Your youth and energy will help you in this challenge, and the people of this congregation stand ready to do our part to support you."

Barry had been advised to move slowly in making broad changes in the church's ministry. He reasoned that even though the congregation wanted change, change was still a hard thing, and that the people might not fully realize the depth of change that would be required of them in order to reach an entirely different demographic group.

So in his first year as pastor, Barry had concentrated on investing in the lives of the congregation and its leaders and working to understand the history, traditions, and habits of the church. The only changes he made were small ones, such as spending a little extra money to brighten the children's ministry rooms and adding to his sermons an occasional illustration designed to be relevant to the parents of young children, although there were not terribly many in his audience. In addition, Barry and Sophia had committed to getting to know their neighbors, their lives and children, in hopes that over time some of their new friends would indicate spiritual interest or a desire to see their own children involved in a church.

In his second year, Barry had decided to make slightly bolder changes, such as introducing contemporary instruments into the worship service and offering praise music in addition to the traditional hymns the congregation was used to. He heard a few grumbles from older members of the church who suggested that the new songs weren't quite reverent enough or that the new instruments were too loud, but by and large the congregation did not seem to object.

Even more significant, two neighboring families of the Wolf's, the Wilson and Davis families, began to attend First Community. Barry and Sophia had enjoyed cookouts with the families, Barry had been to a couple of Cubs games with Rick Wilson and Todd Davis, their kids seemed to enjoy hanging out, and they began to form close friendships.

As the three couples grew closer, both the Wilsons and Davises casually asked if they could come to the church, once, just to "check out what Barry was up to on Sunday mornings." Barry and Sophia were delighted, and they were positively thrilled when the couples began to attend regularly. The Wilsons in particular became involved quickly, as Sandra agreed to take the reins of a new youth ministry and Rick volunteered to oversee the church's finance committee.

Most of the long-time members of the church welcomed the new couples and several of the couples' friends who had also been attending the church. Barry was encouraged that he was realizing success in carrying out the charge the selection committee had given him. He was convinced that First Community was nearing a tipping point when young families would begin to come to the church in numbers.

With that in mind, Barry began to make changes in the church designed to make it attractive to the families Barry predicted would be coming soon.

The church completed the renovation of the children's wing. They spruced up the basketball area out back, replacing the weathered goalpost and drooping, netless rim with a sleek glass-backboard model. Volunteer crews trimmed the weeds around the little-used softball field and rechalked the lines, and the church formed its first team in ages.

Perhaps most important, Barry had begun (finally, in his mind) to modernize elements of the worship service. He stopped putting outlines in the worship bulletin and began to project the main points of his sermons via PowerPoint onto a newly installed screen. Contemporary praise songs pushed traditional hymns almost completely off the service agenda.

Barry began to show clips of recent films to illustrate points in his messages. And he moved from a verse-by-verse teaching of Bible books to a more thematic approach. His goal was to apply the Bible to the day-to-day lives of young families, and the names of his sermon series began to transition from titles such as "The joy of Redemption" to "Biblical Principles for Strong Families" and "How to Raise Great Kids in Dangerous Times."

With each transition, Barry heard a few more grumbles, but the protests seemed to be under control, and Barry ascribed them to inevitable growing pains.

On this afternoon, Barry sat in his office going over his notes for the evening board meeting. Tonight was to be the regular sixmonth review of ministries and finances in which the board weighed in on the everyday life of the church. During his time at First Community, Barry had largely succeeded at changing the tone of these meetings from petty criticisms of details to a strategy session in which the board evaluated the previous six months in light of the church's mission statement.

But this afternoon Barry was worried. Sophia and Barry had both heard whisperings that tonight was going to be a showdown. Jim Grendell, who would chair the meeting, had not returned Barry's calls for three days, in spite of the fact that Barry had seen Jim's car parked next to his warehouse across the street from the church. And perhaps most ominous, Jim had not submitted to Barry an agenda for the meeting, departing from routine.

Barry breathed a quick prayer, straightened the papers on his desk, grabbed his legal pad and pen, and walked down the hall to the board's conference room. It would be nice to have Elliott here to help me through this meeting, he thought as he eased into his chair at the conference table.

Precisely at 7:00 p.m., Jim called the meeting to order. After an opening prayer, Jim turned to Barry. "Pastor, I'm sorry I didn't have an agenda for you prior to tonight's meeting. To be honest, the agenda has changed in the last few days. A number of members of

the board have suggested that we have more than our usual perfunctory review tonight. What these board members believe is that we should have a very serious discussion about the whole philosophy of our church and how it seems to be drifting in some dangerous directions.

"I am merely representing other members of the board," Jim continued. "But I bow to the wishes of these godly men and women. It is important that we have this discussion, and the forum tonight, Pastor, will allow for us to have some straight talk and to ask you some pointed questions. I am sure you will agree that it is much better for us to deal with this out in the open than to pretend the issues are not there, correct?"

Barry felt trapped and nervous, but he couldn't figure out how to challenge Jim's question. He merely nodded his head.

"Barry, I have tried to summarize the comments I have heard, and they seem to fall into several categories."

Jim looked down at his notes. "First, there is a theological concern. A lot of people feel that you are watering down your theology by moving away from the Bible and on to pop culture references which have no place in church.

"There is also a pastoral concern. We all want to reach the young families in our area, but we have to take care of the people we already have too. We have seniors here who have a lot of needs and a lot of faithful people who are used to good strong Bible teaching, and their needs have to be met as well.

"A lot of people have financial concerns too," Jim continued. "We have spent an awful lot of money on superficial, cosmetic things like a basketball court and a softball field, and some people feel that we are wasting God's money. And there is a lot of concern over the big screen in the sanctuary. It just doesn't seem to fit, and when you can always put your sermon notes in the bulletin, we're not sure why the expense for the screen and projector was necessary."

Barry noted that for the first time Jim had referred to himself as sharing the feelings of the nameless others whose opinions he claimed to represent.

"We've noticed that a lot of these financial decisions have come since your friend Rick Wilson has taken the reins of the financial committee," said Jim. "And there is some concern as well that you and some of the newer members of the church are trying to grab the power here. I know you are probably not really trying to do that, but perception is everything, and right now that's the way it looks.

"And I guess that leads me to the last concern," Jim said, swiveling in his chair and looking at Barry directly for the first time in the meeting. "All of these other issues seem to point to an overall leadership issue. We know that you are well intentioned, but you are pretty green at being a pastor. This is your first pastorate, and you haven't had the years of experience and seasoning to learn that you just can't make changes at this fast of a pace and while alienating a lot of sincere, mature Christian people.

"It is a tough job, and we are willing to see if you can do it after all." Jim's gaze took in the entire room of board members. "But we want to save this church, not see it split apart into pieces because of a pastor's well-intentioned but not really great leadership."

Bizarrely, Jim put his hand tenderly on Barry's right shoulder. "Barry, you know I have a great deal of fondness for you in my heart." Barry noticed with a strange sense of detachment that Jim's eyes were teary and his voice was quavering a little. "But I'm not sure if you are up to this, and I don't want to see either you or the church get hurt as a result."

There was a long and very uncomfortable silence as Jim ended his presentation. Barry glanced around the room and noticed that two or three board members were glaring at him, while the majority of the others looked profoundly uncomfortable and had a hard time meeting Barry's gaze. All seemed to be waiting on someone to say something, and Barry sensed it was time for him to step up.

"I think I hear you, Jim," he began in a voice that was surprisingly level. "You don't think I'm measuring up as a preacher, financial leader, pastor, or leader. That's quite a resume of failure. You have blindsided and manipulated me by not sharing your thoughts prior to this meeting, and I don't appreciate that. But at the same time I do not want to hurt the church. If I am that kind of failure, it may indeed be time to make a switch. I don't really feel comfortable talking about that now, since this is Jim's meeting, but I do think it would be best for me to leave so that you all may talk about these very important matters."

With that, Barry got up and left the room.

BARRY AND ELLIOTT HAD NEVER MET at night, but Elliott had agreed quickly to make some time when Barry had called from the cell phone in his car immediately after leaving the board meeting. Barry had described the meeting very briefly, and Elliott had invited him to come out to the house right away.

At night, Elliott's stately house was beautiful, framed by the tall trees and the moonlight. As Elliott opened the door, it occurred to Barry that he had never seen or heard anyone else in the house. He made a mental note to ask Elliott about that sometime.

Elliott, impeccably dressed as always, invited Barry into his study and onto the now-familiar brown couch. He listened as Barry replayed the board meeting. When Barry was done, Elliott gave a low whistle through his teeth.

"That sounds like a nightmare of a meeting, Barry," Elliott said, leaning back in his chair. "Yet you seem calmer than you might have been weeks ago. What are you feeling and thinking?"

"I should be angry, I suppose," replied Barry. "And I am, at some level. But mostly I feel numb. And resigned. Maybe you were right the very first time we met when you said I might not be up to this job. I spent the drive out here thinking about where we would move, what I would do to support Sophia and the kids if I left this pastorate."

"I can certainly understand how you might be feeling that way, Barry," said Elliott. "It's not easy for any man to have his character and competency questioned, especially in front of others and in a forum in which he is not free to defend himself. Let me ask you this, though. Is there a part of you that wants to do something other than to run away?"

Barry thought for a moment and a fierce light seemed to come into his eyes. He stood up suddenly. "You know what, there is, Elliott!" he exclaimed. "And I actually think that that part of me is bigger than the one that wants to flee and protect. What I really want to do is to take the fight right back at Jim Grendell, to show him and those weak people whom he has manipulated that he can't get away with that behavior. You know, I bet Jim has been doing this his whole life, bullying people who stand in his way. Someone has to stop it, and that someone might as well be me. I am the pastor after all, and if a pastor can't be strong in a church, who is going to be?"

Barry sat back down on the couch, only this time his posture was not a slump but instead was ramrod straight. "What do you think, Elliott?"

Elliott put his thumb under his chin and his index finger on his mouth and considered Barry for a moment. "I think, Barry, that we are getting close to something very important here.

"One consistent theme in our conversations has been your deep dislike for Jim and the things you perceive he has done to undermine you and your leadership. And he has in fact done some of those things. There can be no doubt about that."

Elliott stood up, walked over to one of the large windows in his study, and looked outside, his back facing Barry. "Yes," he said after a moment, "I do think we are getting somewhere."

Elliott turned around and came and sat on the opposite end of the couch. "So let's not let this moment pass, my friend," he said. "Tell me, Barry, what is it about Jim that disturbs you the most, that causes you to react so strongly to him? I'm speaking not so much of his actions as of his character traits."

Barry answered quickly, "He's a know-it-all. He plays power games to make himself feel important. His own power is more important to him than the welfare of the church. And all of this comes from his own insecurity and fear that his life has been a failure. He is fake and hides his true identity. I hate that last thing most of all, his insincerity and phoniness. The Jim that he shows the world is nothing like the real Jim, the man he is inside."

"And the irony of the whole thing is that as a man, he doesn't really have the track record or the platform to claim the kind of great success or competence that leads to superior leadership and the right to tell others what to do. He has been a modestly successful businessman. But most of his wealth was from his wife's family ... he married into money. He did fine in insurance, I guess, but now he just owns a few properties, like that run-down, dismal warehouse across the street from my office. It looked fine a few years ago, and trucks were coming and going, but now it sits mostly empty, gathering cobwebs."

"Maybe that warehouse is a metaphor for the man. I've never thought of that before," said Barry. "His image looks good on the outside, but on the inside there is nothing there. I do think I despise that most of all, the fact that the inside does not match the outside."

Barry paused, seemingly struck by this new realization, giving Elliott a chance to respond.

"Barry," said the older man, "have you ever met Jim Grendell before?"

"Met him before?" responded Barry. "What do you mean? The first time I met him was when his committee began to recruit me to come to First Community."

Elliott smiled a wisp of a smile. "I didn't mean have you met Jim Grendell the man before. I meant, have you ever met anyone like him, with those traits which annoy you so much?"

Barry wrinkled his forehead in thought. "I don't know, but I do know this. The traits Jim has, the ones that I described, have always driven me crazy. I have to pray for patience when I come across someone who is a bully or a know-it-all or pretends to be something they aren't or who tries to impress others beyond what they really have to offer."

Elliott smiled, again a wisp. "Okay, Barry. Now we're down to the heart of it." Elliott got up from the couch and walked over to the cherry cabinet containing his whiteboard. He swung the doors open and then unbuttoned the cuffs of his crisp blue button-down shirt, rolling them up twice. He found a green marker and wrote a sentence on the whiteboard:

We meet the same person over and over again

Elliott turned around and noticed Barry's face crinkled in confusion. "Wondering what I mean?" he chuckled. Barry nodded.

"All of us have people in our lives that elicit strong emotions," said Elliott. "Now that is a truly unfortunate phrase, but you understand what I'm saying. In particular, there are certain traits that show up in other people that drive us to distraction. For some people that is lateness or laziness, for others disrespect or a foul mouth, for still others bragging or acting superior. And the list goes on. Are you with me so far?"

"Sure," Barry replied. "Keep going."

"The problem is that these traits that have power for us are traits that reside within us. We're not aware of these traits because we don't like them, and when we see them in others, we automatically react."

Elliott picked up the marker, turned to the board, but then turned back to Barry. "Let's put those two things together. Can you see it?"

Barry nodded. "I think so. You're saying that all of us have a list of traits which annoy us and that some of these traits, for whatever reason, actually lead us to be angry and avoidant and sometimes even hostile toward people who demonstrate them."

"Exactly right, Barry," beamed Elliott. Turning back to the whiteboard again, he continued. "A minute ago I wrote that we keep meeting the same person over and over—that person who has traits we cannot stand. You understand that. Now let me finish that thought for you."

Elliott wrote a second sentence underneath the first:

And that person is you

Elliott put an emphatic green underline to his phrase and turned around to see a truly confused Barry.

"Elliott, you had me. And now you've lost me. What do you mean?"

"I'm glad you asked that," replied Elliott with a wide smile. "Let's get into the deep water now. When we react to traits in someone else, it is important to understand that we are really reacting to something inside ourselves. You are a pastor, so can I try to put it into mildly theological language for you?"

Barry nodded.

"Barry, the fundamental fact of human nature is that we are all of us complex beings having both a part that we readily acknowledge and embrace—our aware side—and a side that is denied—our unaware side. The aware side is that part of us we really like, that is cheerful, hopeful, kind, concerned for the welfare of others, committed to our faith, brave ... you understand my point.

"That other side, that we are not aware of, tends to get denied and pushed away. But you can't deny a part of yourself. When you do, it comes out in other ways, usually destructive ones."

Elliott fell into his familiar leather chair and raked his right hand through his thick white hair. Barry noticed that the lines in Elliott's face seemed deepened, as if this conversation was costing him something. Elliott seemed tired. And yet he seemed fully alive. It was that look in his eyes. Not a twinkle, exactly, but more like a reflection of some fire burning deep inside the man.

"When we discover the part of us we don't like, that is the moment we can learn the most about ourselves. That will also allow us to help others as well. It's not the part of us we know but the part of us we don't know that will be the most beneficial."

Elliott looked up again, directly at Barry. "I know it has been a long and hard night for you, Barry. But I feel that I need to bring a few strands together from our discussion. Do you have a few more minutes?"

Barry agreed, so Elliott continued. "I said two things earlier. First, we keep meeting the same person over and over again in our lives—the person with the traits which are most repugnant to us and sometimes cause a violent reaction in us. Second, I said that the person you keep meeting again and again is you. Let me clarify that and tie it together with the denied and acknowledged sides of who we are.

"When we react so strongly and negatively to traits in another person, it is a certain indication that we are actually reacting to something that is lodged in our unaware side. Those traits in that person remind us of something in ourselves, or something we fear could be in ourselves. If we have not acknowledged and begun to understand our denied side, then we cannot deal with the fact that these things are in us. It is simply too threatening. So we have to do something with that angst.

"What we do with this angst is to see it in other people. And we project it onto the person against whom we react so strongly. They become a movie screen onto which we project our own selves. It is easier to look at these things when they are outside of us and easier to deny the pain of them when we can attach them to someone else. You are doing this with Jim. He is your movie screen."

Barry felt agitated and began to shift uncomfortably in his seat.

"Barry, you have not yet understood your own denied side, your own capacity to be and to do what you see in Jim. Jim represents that part of you that you fear the most. His insecurities are actually your insecurities. It's just easier to see them in someone else than in yourself. When you react with loathing toward Jim, then you are really expressing a loathing of yourself."

Barry felt like he was about to explode, and Elliott sensed it.

"Just a few more thoughts, Barry. Jesus once said to people who were struggling to forgive and were choosing to mask it with religiosity that before they could remove the speck of dust from the eye of another they needed to remove the plank from their own eye. Usually those who teach this passage conclude that Jesus' message is that we should not condemn another of sinning until we are pretty sure our lives are moving toward sinlessness. And I suppose that is right, insofar as it goes. But I think that teaching misses the real impact of what Jesus is saying.

"I don't think Jesus meant that we should have a vague awareness of our own capacity to sin and our need for forgiveness. I think that the plank symbolizes something deeper. Jesus meant that we have to understand that we could easily be guilty of the things we rush to condemn in others—the exact same things. I think he was saying that those things we are quickest to denounce in others are the things most likely to be present in ourselves. I get my ideas on this from him, Barry. They are not a product of the 'secular mind' you mentioned.

"The secular mind changes all of the time, and few people pay much heed. But words like Jesus' are different. They tend to get people killed, in more ways than one. They are just too hard to accept, so we have to get rid of them by banishing them from the village or burning them at the stake or refusing to associate with people who believe them and even sometimes nailing them to two pieces of wood shaped like a lowercase t.

"Barry, I'm going to throw out an odd phrase, one that will help you a great deal. It's sort of a mantra of mine. 'Resistance is your ally.' It's your ally, not your enemy, because it shows you that what you are doing is not working. Applied here, that means that Jim Grendell is not really your nemesis. In fact, he is likely to be the best teacher you have ever had, if you are willing to humble yourself and learn from him. The things you believe you see in him may well be in him. But that is less important than the fact that your reaction to them indicates beyond a reasonable doubt that they are firmly lodged in you."

Barry could not take anymore. He stood up and raised his voice to a level that surprised even him.

"Enough, Elliott!" he thundered. "That is so far out of line, and you are out of line. How dare you? I got crucified by the board tonight, led by Grendell. They called into question the essence of my existence as a man. I came to you for help sorting it out, and instead you suggest that the problem is me and you actually take Jim's side. You are no better than them!"

Barry snatched his coat and headed for the foyer. "Let me tell you this, Elliott. You may have a lot of wisdom. But you also have the capacity to kick a man when he is down. I am trying to courageously confront a self-righteous, manipulative bully who hides who he really is behind a veneer of piousness and emotion and who is about to divide my church, and instead you tell me that the problem is me. With friends like you ..." Barry let the thought die and instead opened the front door. "Thanks a lot, Elliott, for a lovely, condemning evening."

With that, Barry was out the door.

FIFTEEN MINUTES INTO HIS DRIVE, Barry pulled out his cell phone and called a gruff apology to Elliott. He told him that he knew Elliott was only trying to help, but his words had been ill-timed. Barry went on to say that he needed some space from Elliott, and he needed to tend to the problems in his church and home by himself for a while.

Elliott said that he understood but also offered to be available should Barry need him.

Elliott closed the phone call by saying, "You have put way more than your toe into the water, Barry. Tonight you got close to fullbody immersion. You have the right and the ability to get out of the water should you choose. You don't have to go any farther. But I believe in my heart that you have the courage and fortitude to dive into the deep water and confront whatever it is that awaits you there."

Barry switched off his phone and sighed. "Right, deep water. Like I'm going to go there. I'm up to my neck as it is," Barry mumbled to himself as he continued the drive home. At the last moment, he swung his car toward the church, pulled into the parking lot, let himself in, and sat in his office, looking out the window.

The window framed Jim's warehouse across the street, gray and formless in the weak security lights. And Barry thought about how when it is dark outside and there is a light behind you, you can see what is outside the window and a reflection of yourself, both at the same time.

2. Duane Elmer, *Cross cultural Conflict*, pages 22-32

CULTURAL DIVERSITY WAS GOD'S IDEA (AND SO WAS UNITY)

One sparrow does not make spring.

LATIN AMERICAN PROVERB

It was God who authored human diversity. This fact calls all of us to deal with cultural diversity, see it as he sees it—as good—and honor it as the handiwork of the wise and sovereign Creator. Most of us do not welcome diversity into our lives. It forces us to change, disrupts our cozy patterns, engages us in a world where our deficiencies are exposed. Yet for all the less than appealing features of cultural and ethnic variety, important insights about God and his world go undiscovered if we avoid creative engagement with human diversity.

It Was Very Good

After completing the creation, God looked around, saw a vast array of diversity in all he had created and declared it "very good" (Gen 1:31). Diversity *is* rooted in the creative activity of God. But one wonders, Why? For what reason did God display such variety in his human, plant, animal and inorganic world? It is my conviction that only in this immense and grand variety could we begin to capture the character, grace and glory of God. Put another way, God cannot adequately be revealed in a creation of similarities.

Thus in the process of learning about other cultures, affirming our various ethnic heritages and honoring (if not celebrating) diversity, we enlarge our appreciation for God, who in authoring diversity was trying to tell us about himself. Perhaps we are most like God when we also look around and affirm as good peoples and traditions different from our own and diligently seek to appreciate the beauty God has chosen to express in others.

The very differences God pronounced "very good" are also the greatest threat to Christian unity. Differences can build stronger bonds between people or it can break them. Broken relationships often result from a failure to understand and adjust to the differences we have inherited from a wise God.

Certainly not everything that belongs to your tradition or mine is good. Much has been contaminated by sin and needs to be either eliminated from our lives or reclaimed for the glory of God. Sin makes the effort of building unity across diversity more difficult but not impossible.

My experiences suggest that the large majority of conflicts resulting in brokenness are caused neither by core theological values being threatened nor by overt sin. Most conflicts that disrupt our lives grow out of innocent misunderstandings, unmet expectations, failure to get all the facts, or minor irritations that fester and become problems. If this is true, then we need to remind ourselves how important it is to deal effectively with conflict, since neglect brings pain and potential separation from those we love. We need to reconsider the biblical teaching on the unity of God's people and how it reflects his glory and affects the carrying out of his mission in this world.

Conflict, Unity and the Gospel

The Western world does not place a high premium on unity. Wherever individualism reigns supreme, community is easily sacrificed for personal preferences. Although I enjoy the luxuries of individualism, I cannot help but feel that it has also brought a certain impoverishment. Too quickly we splinter churches, friendships, families, and groups rather than struggle for ways to bridge differences, reconnect, forgive, reconcile and heal.

Individualism fosters an impatience with people and institutions: we can always join another church, find new friends or get another job. As long as we have options, we do not need to work at preserving our present relationships. At any sign of discomfort we jettison them and start over with someone else.

The dubious luxury of disposable relationships has a dark side—a serious dark side. We can afford to take the unity of believers lightly if other options are available and relatively painless. But failures in individual and community relationships cast aspersions on God's reputation. As a church splits, as a friendship dissolves, as a marriage ruptures, as colleagues become adversaries, the body of Christ fractures. These fractures are noticed by the unbelieving world. If God cannot keep his own people from becoming adversaries,

why should a reflective onlooker consider becoming a Christian? We Christians seem no different from those around us.

Repeatedly, the Bible declares unity to be an important value, worth pouring our energies into and worth fighting for. Failure to preserve unity suggests an impotent God and affects the credibility of the gospel.

I am not advocating a "peace at any price" position. I am saying that in the West Christians have often fought for the wrong things and splintered groups over individual preferences and personalities rather than violations of the core of our biblical faith.

Paul's use of the body metaphor suggests that unless we work in harmony, we labor in vain. A fractured body is dysfunctional. Even more powerful is John's exhortation that Christians be one as the Trinity is one (**Jn 17**): unity *is* Godlike. Other passages suggest that disunity veils or hides the glory of God, while the glory of God is revealed through our living together in unity. The ability to respect human and cultural differences and not let them disrupt harmony is powerful testimony to the love and power of God.

Conflict, Unity and God's Glory

John 17 contains our Lord's prayer for those who were his disciples and those who would become his disciples. It could be called the "glory chapter," since *glory* or some variation of it occurs about nine times. The ultimate goal for our existence is to glorify God, and we are most like God when we are in union with one another just as the members of the Trinity are in union.

In the opening *verses* Jesus prays for himself, stating his concern for glorifying the Father. Next he turns his attention to the disciples and the glory they will bring to the Father. In his prayer for them he says, "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name" (v. 11). What kind of protection is Jesus requesting for the disciples? Is it physical protection because they will face persecution and martyrdom? Read further in verse 11: "so that they may be one as we are one." Jesus prays that their *unity* will be protected. This is a special kind of unity: "that they may be one as we are one." It is a unity that reflects the Godhead.

The oneness among Jesus' followers is to be modeled after that found in the Trinity. The Trinity is marked by diversity, distinct functions and roles, yet perfect unity. The disciples also have diversity, distinct functions (according to gifts and abilities) and varieties of roles to play, but they too are to be unified under the name of their Father and in their purpose of manifesting the glory of God. Jesus was quite aware that unity would be an ongoing struggle for his followers (see Lk 22:24-30).

In John 17:20 the Lord turns his thoughts toward us, his followers in the church today. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." Jesus makes a special request of the Father on our behalf. As he nears the moment of death, what does he consider most important for those who will carry his message and represent his glory on this earth? What is absolutely essential if the church is to be the "body of Christ" conveying the message of God's saving grace to the world? Jesus prays "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (v. 21).

Here, in one verse, is the link between the unity of God's people and the fulfillment of God's mission in this world. Our ability to resolve conflict, thus preserving unity, is directly related to people's coming to Christ. Humanly speaking, the world's believing is contingent on believers' oneness. The body of Christ, when its members live together in unity, becomes the visible manifestation of the triune God.

The contrary is also true. A lack of unity in our relationships veils the glory of God. So relationships affect mission. When we

nurture unity among ourselves, we declare that God loves us and sent his Son to secure our redemption.

Why Doesn't God Send Revival?

Christians often say, "Why doesn't God send revival?" or "Why doesn't God give us some fruit for our labors?" Of course I do not have any final answer for that question, but John 17 suggests one reason could be that unresolved interpersonal conflicts have destroyed the unity that God uses to bring blessing and revival. Perhaps we need to pray for healing and restored relationships as well as revival. This text suggests that one is necessary for the other.

If the watching world observes the love of God holding believers together, they are confronted with the glory of God in his people. It is the glory of God that penetrates the darkness of their lives so that they are brought to a point of decision. But if they see broken relationships, schisms, gossip, and people exploiting one another, a message about God's power and love will have little effect. The glory of God and the impact of his gospel are tied to solidarity in his body.

The Priority of Relationships

The church at Corinth stood as dubious testimony to all that represented the worst of worldliness in the church. Whatever the problem, they had it in good measure. Only the most courageous pastor would consider accepting a call to this church. Suppose you had in front of you the long list of sins, problems and deficiencies in the Corinthian church. Now imagine that you were the apostle Paul and had been charged by God to write them a letter addressing the problems.

What topic would you address first? Idolatry? Abuse of the Lord's table? Divisiveness and schisms? Sexual immorality? Lawsuits against other believers? Fidelity and integrity in marriage? The flaunting of freedom before those whose consciences are weak? Personal rights? Improper uses of and attitudes about gifts? Impropriety in worship? Major theological errors? Poor stewardship of God's money?

Many of us would be inclined to start with the grosser sins, but Paul starts with an issue that he believes foundational to all others. In fact, he spends three chapters on this topic: building interpersonal solidarity. Unless relationships are intact, all other resolutions and corrections will be reduced to rubble as arguments, disagreements and disrespect continue. Unity is foundational to everything else that God wishes to accomplish in his church.

In 1:10 Paul begins with his goal: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." He then mentions a report from Chloe's household that "there are quarrels among you."

"Quarrels" is the Greek word *schismata*, from which we get the English word *schism*. This word was used in the garment industry to describe a piece of cloth that had somehow become mangled, torn, stained, wrinkled and altogether unattractive. Paul's hearers, coming across this word, would immediately think of the marketplace where the garment merchants hung their finest pieces to attract shoppers into their shops. No merchant would hang up a *schismata* garment, for the tears, holes, stains and wrinkles would only serve to drive customers away. Who would be interested in the merchandise if they saw *schismata*?

The Corinthians must have immediately gotten the point: who would be interested in considering Christ if when they saw Christians they saw *schismata*? Relationships affect the integrity of the gospel. Life and witness cannot be separated.

Realizing this, Paul begins dealing with the severe interpersonal problems. If *schismata* can be replaced with wholeness and unity, the power of the Gospel can be released.

In 1 Corinthians 3, divisiveness in the church is equated with spiritual infancy. It is ironic how often people think they are spiritually mature when they cause relational havoc in the church. Note that the contrast between "wood, hay or straw" and "gold, silver [and] costly stones" (3:12-15) is found in this context of interpersonal relationships. The gold, silver and costly stones should be seen as acts that contribute to harmony, affirmation, building one another up, thinking the best about the other, turning the other cheek, serving the body, esteeming the other greater than oneself. The wood, hay and straw may then be construed as attitudes and acts that disrupt unity for reasons God considers unworthy.

Paul closes his discourse on relationships with the analogy of the temple (3:16-17; compare 6:19-20). The word translated "temple" is the Old Testament word for "holy of holies" or "holiest place." The holiest place was the part of the temple where the visual presence of God's glory, called the *Shekinah* glory, could be seen. God no longer dwells in buildings, but in people by his Spirit. This indwelling makes each person and each gathering of God's people a holy place. In this text the emphasis rests on the local church body as the dwelling place of God, whereas in 6:19-20 the emphasis *is* on the individual as the holy place.'

Because God's habitation *is* in us, it follows that just as his glory was revealed in the temple, so his glory is seen in us—not the *Shekinah* glory, but the glory of God's presence in our unity, good works toward others, commitment to share his gospel and lives in obedience to his Word. In these ways we reveal his glory. But the text says that unity is one of the most important ways we reveal God's presence. Thus the destruction of unity is the destruction of something that God has made holy. Any activity contributing to disunity also contributes to the veiling of God's glory.

Of such importance is this concept that Paul issues a most ominous warning. Note 3:17: "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." God intends to build his people into one unified, harmonious, beautiful body that reveals the glory of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

As a reminder of the Corinthians' history and need to remain vigilant in guarding relationships, Paul closes his second letter to the Corinthians with this exhortation: "Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor 13:11).

Unity, God's Glory and Mission

In Romans 14 Paul deals with differences that endanger unity, primarily eating preferences and observance of special days. Rather than be divided over these matters and destroy each other (v. 15), he says, "accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (v. 1). "Disputable matters" refers to individual preferences, opinions or debatable points—issues where there is reasonable doubt as to the absolutely correct interpretation.

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. (v. 13)

Let us . . . make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. (vv. 19-20) In this context of differences, Paul comes forth with a compelling plea for unity: "May the God who gives

endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 15:5-6).

It is noteworthy that Paul's plea for unity and oneness is joined with the notion of glorifying God. Paul then tells us how to make this unity a reality: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (15:7). "Accept" is another way of saying "honor" or "hold in high regard"—we are to treat each other as important, significant, worthy.

Christ is the model for our acceptance of each other. He treated us with honor even though we were undeserving and openly rebellious against him. In this way he reconciled many in eternal union with himself. And he delights when we daily express that union with him. Yet beyond our individual relationships with him, he yearns for the collective unity of his followers and their collective union with him.

A parent loves each child individually, but that love is heightened when the children love each other. When the children fight and become alienated, the parent's love remains, but the joy of that love is mingled with pain.

Paul explains that the natural outcome of unity is mission—"so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy" (Rom 15:9). The glory of God revealed through the loving union of the people of God draws others into his mercy, so that they join their lives with ours in declaring his glory.

Summary

In most cultures of the world, friendships and community are among the strongest forces for bringing people to faith in Christ. If we are not good in relationships, if we cannot create solidarity, from a human standpoint there is little that will attract people to the gospel.

Building the unity of the body of Christ is the most effective way of jealously guarding the glory of God. Understanding and handling conflict with greater wisdom should minimize or prevent the damaging effects of broken relationships. It is a worthy goal to reduce the human suffering that accompanies alienation between people and groups. But even the healing motive is not sufficient to justify the pursuit of unity unless it is attached to unity's ultimate purpose: the revelation of God's glory.

Conflict Management & Resolution

Unit 3

How Do Christian Leaders Resolve Conflict?

Learning to Forgive



Development Associates International

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James Osterhaus, *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict*, pp. 55-66

Learning Objectives:

- Learn how to forgive
- Establish a Biblical framework for forgiveness
- Learn stages of forgiveness
- Practice forgiving oneself and others
- Learn practical steps in forgiving

Introduction

We've talked about obstacles in managing conflict in Unit 2. We turn our attention now to resolving conflict. What do we do in situations that we cannot control or that evolve into interpersonal struggles? How do we resolve these situations?

We will approach the subject methodologically or strategically in the next Unit (4). Before we get to that however, there are some basic things we need to cover first.

Forgiveness is fundamental in dealing with conflict and this unit is entirely about that, what it is, what it isn't and how to do it.

Let's begin with establishing a general understanding of what forgiveness is to get started. Essentially forgiveness is an act of releasing the consequences for an offense they have committed against you. To forgive a person is to excuse them for an offense they committed against us and to stop being angry and resentful toward their behaviors.

Forgiveness can be the act of overlooking an incident and a resolve not to discuss it or even try to solve it. This is especially effective if it is a one-sided one-time offense. I think this is what the apostle Paul intended when he said,

1 *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love* (Ephesians 4:1,2 NIV).

Notice the words in verse 2 "patient" and "bearing with one another in love." The J.B Philips translation translates verse 2 in these words, "make allowances for each other because of the quality of your love for one another." In other words we are told to put up with the faults of others sometimes. That we can't always effect change in others and there are times that we just have to live with the faults of others because the love of Christ requires it and the unity of the body of Christ (the Church) needs it.

We'll illustrate it in the words of a friend who said

I must honor Him no matter how I am treated by others. I must also submit the control of the situation to Him. He might resolve it immediately or it might not happen overnight and it might take a long time. Either way, He has not guaranteed that everyone will treat me correctly and that everyone will like me or what I do.

I should not even have a goal of being treated well, or being liked. My goal is to please my Heavenly Father and find His approval. It stops there.

When I seek man's approval I miss God's approval. In the meantime, I am to live at peace with others as best I can while obeying God.

I realized how long I had gone in my Christian life with kind of an independent, rebellious, got to have it my way kind of Christianity. The Lord has spoken to me about submitting to Him, to His authority, and to the authority of those over me and of truly being a servant.

I learned something important about forgiveness from my friend. I learned that there is a relationship between being forgiven by God and experiencing forgiveness with others. More will be said about this below.

Go to the box below and describe an event, person or situation in which you need to either extend forgiveness or receive it.

Think about it?

Answer Box # 1

1. Describe a situation in which you need to extend forgiveness.
2. Describe a situation in which you would like to receive forgiveness.



application

Overview and Background

Over the past ten years, the issue of forgiveness has received more attention in our western cultures than before. Numerous books and articles on the subject have been

published, national conferences have been held, and international conferences have been convened to study forgiving. Christian relief and development organizations and secular NGOs have established departments or assigned personnel to conduct research and to implement the results of their studies on conflict management, peace and reconciliation. Why is there so much more interest now?

One factor that helps explain this phenomena is that until recently, psychotherapists particularly in the secular West, avoided the issue of forgiveness because they thought it was too religious in nature. But that began to change after 1988, due to the advent of programs for the adult children of alcoholics and therapeutic work among victims of severe physical and sexual abuse (Douglas Showalter, Website <http://www.vsg.cape.com/~dougshow/index.html> retrieved June 9, 2006).

These emphases and programs led psychotherapists to research the significance of forgiving in psychological healing. As awareness in the therapeutic community grew, the issue of forgiving quickly entered the mainstream of our society, as a subject of widespread interest and beyond the Christian context.

One might argue that secular society would not be expected to emphasize forgiveness whereas the Church did. And there is substance to the argument that pastors and Christian leaders may well have included in their calendars messages/teachings about forgiveness. And in this sense one could argue further that forgiveness in the Christian sense has been around for as long as the Church and the Bible have existed.

Showalter helps us a bit more on this point. He explains that these recent studies have revealed at least four traditional views of forgiving which are held by most Christians in Western cultures and by Christians in other cultures who have been strongly influenced by Christian teaching from the West.

I summarize them below:

1. Abused women in Western societies have often been taught that it is their duty to forgive and be reunited with their abusive husbands, even while the abuse continues! Recent psychotherapeutic research of forgiving, as well as feminist and African-American critiques, the injustice and potential for harm in such advice is now widely realized. Christians must acknowledge that this traditional view of “dutiful obedience” regardless of the situation of violence or conflict was lacking.

Prior to ten years ago in Western society, Christian forgiveness was usually looked at from the viewpoint of injurers, and *not* from the perspective of victims. It is no surprise then that the notion of victimization characterizes many Christians both in Western cultures and in cultures that have been strongly influenced by Western Christian teaching on the subject. *Victimization* is the attitude or feeling of a person that he or she has been unfairly singled out for punishment or ill treatment. It’s an attitude that restricts a sense of personal responsibility for one’s part in conflict.

2. A second traditional view held by some Christians is that repentance and reconciliation are essential components of any act of Christian forgiving. Thus, when repentance and reconciliation are not present, forgiveness itself is said to have been diminished or to have not taken place at all. In this model, the act of forgiving is viewed as a transaction between victim and injurer which must end successfully.

Using psychotherapeutic insights, this view is now rejected by Christians who make a sharp distinction between forgiving and reconciliation. Such Christians view forgiving as a one-person act, authentic in and of itself for the person who

forgives, apart from the injurer. In contrast, they see reconciliation as a two-person act which, though desirable, is not always achievable, depending on the situation.

As much as any forgiver may wish for an injurer to repent and for subsequent reconciliation with that injurer, these things are not possible **unless** the injurer also wants them.

3. A traditional view held by still other Christians is that forgiving is a *moral command* which Christians should obey by forgiving others quickly through an act of sheer moral will. Several passages in the Holy Bible are used to substantiate this view, including Jesus' words to forgive seventy times seven, his words to first go and be reconciled before offering one's gift at the altar, and the statement that one should not let the sun go down on one's anger. [Matthew 18:22; 5:23, 24; Ephesians 4:26]

Many Christians now reject a legalistic interpretation of such passages. Drawing from psychotherapeutic insights, they now see forgiving as a process of inner healing which often requires time. Such Christians believe that forgiving which comes only in response to an external command, and not primarily as a response of the heart, is quite possibly premature or inauthentic.

In contrast, such Christians maintain that negative feelings need to be resolved, in order for individuals to be truly at peace with their injurers and injuries. They note that Jesus himself spoke of the importance of forgiving from the heart. [Matthew 18:35]

4. In contrast to these three is a fourth view. Most Christians agree on the following three, biblically supported reasons why Christians should forgive:

- God has forgiven us, which is the ground of all our human forgiving. [Ephesians 4:32]
- Christ tells us to forgive those who wrong us. [Luke 17:3]
- We should forgive for the sake of being reconciled with the person who wronged us. [Luke 15: 11-32] (ibid: Showalter, June 9, 2006)

We think that Showalter's overview is helpful to distinguish at least four ways to think of forgiveness in this Post Modern age. Whichever of these views one might select as being the most Biblical or authentic one must put into the mix the prevailing worldview of one's culture. Without question, as we learned in the Ethics course, Post-Modernism leads us in the direction of *narcissism*, which is nothing more than excessive focus on one's own self, a sense of excessive self-admiration.

The point needs to be made here that forgiveness either for one-self or for others is always two dimensional. The three traditional views outlined above tend to emphasize forgiveness for the injured one (usually one-self) and therefore becomes self focused. It's important to go to the 2nd dimension and emphasize forgiveness for the other also. This is a both/and approach to forgiveness.

We've covered a lot of territory here and some of it is a bit technical. So let's pause a moment and think about what we've learned. Go the box below and interact with the material we've introduced to you.

Answer Box # 2

1. Describe Showalter's four views in your own words.
2. Compare Showalter's 4th view to the understanding you have of the prevailing view about forgiveness in your Christian sub-culture.
3. Interacting with Showalter's views and that of your Christian sub-culture please state here what view you hold.

**application****Case Study**

Let's return to the story of Rajah, Mary and Joseph & Hilda.

Time passed and Rajah backed off from Joseph and let Joseph and Hilda run with their plans and goals for their responsibilities in the organization.

The group prayer meetings were now lead by Joseph and Mary. Rajah and Mary made an effort to be loving and supportive and most of all, not to gossip about this situation. They realized that Joseph and

Mary were still going through a period of adjustment even after the first year.

Joseph and Hilda had some marriage stress. Living in another part of the world and climate, as well as adjusting to a new culture which was stressful. And then Joseph had an accident sustaining an injury that took several months to heal. Mary had health problems too.

Rajah and Mary concluded, this new couple needed grace. This involved letting them find their way by trial and error so that they could discover for themselves what they could do.

The organization valued Joseph and Hilda and did not want to let them go even though that was one option in finding a solution. The organization was committed to training personnel and believed that this was a key to success for everyone.

A significant set-back came when a new and expensive program turned out to be not very successful. This was obvious to everyone in the organization. The apparent lack of success was embarrassing to Joseph and Hilda.

Rajah and Mary were careful in their responses to these failures. They intentionally avoided slander and gossip. They continued to pray and let Hilda and Joseph explain themselves to others as they chose. Months went by and a kind of détente was established between the couples. They all seemed to be trying their best to be cooperative and keep tensions from developing.

One day, in a conversation about a financial concern, Rajah raised a question to Hilda and she replied that she would try to find the information and get back to him. Instead of contacting him directly, however, a caustic e-mail arrived in Rajah's mail from Joseph venting his anger with copies sent to other members of the organization.

Rajah called Joseph and asked about the intensity of the e-mail. Joseph quickly apologized. Later in the day Joseph called Rajah and asked to come and talk with him. Over a cup of coffee Joseph wept saying the email had nothing to do with Rajah but rather the problem was his own. He admitted that he could not account for his feelings but that he was wrong in sending the angry email and asked forgiveness.

The two men talked and for the first time in almost two years, they felt like they were friends dealing with an issue in a productive and loving manner. They prayed together and Joseph left. Later that day an email arrived from Joseph with copies to all those in the organization expressing his regret at having sent it, acknowledged his failure, asked for forgiveness from all who received it and pledged his loyalty to the organization. The next day Rajah received a phone call from Joseph. Joseph wept as he read an email from the director of the organization. It read, "...of course you're forgiven."

Often we do not know all that is involved in a conflict, especially when we are in the middle of it. People need love and compassion and patience. We look at our lives and realize that stressors in marriage, unresolved anger, and lack of maturity create pain and grief for us and others.

Think about it

What did you learn from this exchange about forgiveness? Please interact with the questions below. The idea here is get you to thinking about forgiveness. How does it happen?



Answer Box # 3

1. What caused Joseph to send the angry email?
2. What behaviors were helpful in managing this conflict?
3. Why did the director's letter of acceptance of Joseph's apology have such a huge effect on Joseph?
4. Do you have a broken or strained relationship that needs healing? If so briefly describe how waiting, overlooking and grace might make a big difference.

Have you ever been hurt and can't seem to forget it? You didn't deserve it. You did everything you knew to avoid being hurt, but you were hurt anyway. And the hurt went deep. It went deep enough to lodge itself in your memory. And it keeps hurting even now.

You are not alone. Hurt and inner pain are part of the human experience and often it is this hurt, this pain that stands in the way of forgiveness and ultimately

in the way of dealing with conflicts that emerge. Something that drives the pain even deeper and sharper is the sense that we didn't deserve it!

And then we wonder what to do with it, particularly if we are Christians. We know that the unbelieving standard of the world is to get revenge. The "Golden Rule" Jesus gave is perverted to "do unto others *before* they do it to you." As Christians however there is a sense of doing better, that we're not supposed to hold grudges, or seek revenge and the like.

Forgiveness & Culture

Generally speaking people do not extend or receive forgiveness easily. One might say that forgiving others is *counter cultural*. In many cultures forgiving others or to ask for it is a demonstration of weakness and makes one vulnerable. To express forgiveness or ask for it in the Thai language is to request the offended party to "*long thoot*," meaning please punish me. This is not to say that Thai people

don't forgive or that they are not forgiven for offenses. It simply means that generally speaking forgiveness in the Biblical sense is not a concept at home in the Thai Theravidic Buddhist worldview.

In cultures where distrust is a core value the idea of forgiving an offender is ludicrous. In his book *Peace Child*, Don Richardson describes one of the central worldview assumptions among the *Sawi* people of Papua New Guinea as “treachery.” For example a member of a warring village will look for an opportunity to befriend a member of an enemy village and seek to ingratiate himself to him. He will invite the person to his home, feed him a delicious meal and try to prove that past wrongs have been made right and that they should be friends. This cordial encounter is at first met with suspicion but as time goes on the member of the enemy village, if he is not culturally wise to the deceptions of his enemy, will give in and begin to believe he has indeed been forgiven past wrongs done by his culture members. Until one day when it is obvious he has become totally trusting of his former enemy he is assaulted at another “friendly” dinner, beaten, killed and then becomes the main course in this formerly cannibalistic culture!

Lest we become too judgmental of the Sawi it is good to observe the different forms of treachery we hold in our cultures. Have you ever experienced treachery? Disloyalty? And felt the anger, pain and shame that came to you as you realized you had been wronged purposefully? Take a moment and think about it.

In the box below write briefly about an experience you have had or have observed in your culture.

Answer Box # 4

 **application**

What is forgiveness and how do we go about doing it?

We defined forgiveness above as pardoning someone who has wronged us and the tendency to make allowances for offenses already made against us. As a starting point that is good as far as it goes. Moreover it doesn't go far enough. Let's take another look. And we'll start with a bible study.

 **bible study**

We have all prayed the Lord's Prayer at one time or another, perhaps even having committed it to memory. Please read the text below (Matthew 6: 5-15) either here or you may prefer to use your own Bible in a version or dialect that is more familiar to you.

(5) "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. (6) But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (7) And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. (8) Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

(9) " This, then, is how you should pray:

" Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

(10) your kingdom come,
your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

(11) Give us today our daily bread.

(12) Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

(13) And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

(14) For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

(15) But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (NIV)

Answer Box # 5

1. To whom did Jesus address this prayer?
2. What is the one condition Jesus places on receiving forgiveness?



application

What interests me a great deal about this passage is the phrase "*forgive us our sins/trespases as we forgive those who sin/tresspass against us.*" This is truly a remarkable phrase. It is the one condition

to receiving forgiveness from God. In other words, if we don't forgive others, then we don't get forgiveness from God and in that sense places a lot of importance upon forgiving others.

The point is that extending forgiveness is as important as getting it. So let's spend the next few minutes thinking more about forgiveness.

Expanding the Definition of Forgiveness

Lewis Smedes, professor of ethics at Fuller Seminary and widely published author, focused on forgiveness in his research. He defines forgiveness in his book *Forgiveness, Healing the Hurts we Don't Deserve*. He says forgiveness is "God's invention for coming to terms with a world in which people are unfair to each other and hurt each other deeply, in spite of their best intentions.

He says that forgiveness is not "'forgiving and forgetting," to quote an old English adage.

The reason this approach isn't helpful, says Smedes, is because forgetting simply insures that we never forgive, that we only bury the hurt in a compost pit of resentment and brooding anger.

Why do we forgive?

The most powerful image of forgiveness is the scene of Christ on the cross as he speaks those famous words, "*Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.*" Luke 23:34

Notice the chain of events that preceded these words.

- Jesus is dragged into Pilate's hall for a "trial." Actually it's a kangaroo court. He is found innocent, but the crowds insist he be found guilty anyway, and given the death sentence; a sentence he hadn't earned and didn't deserve.
- Jesus is scourged, beaten, spit upon. Then stripped of his clothing and given a heavy wooden cross to carry through the streets of Jerusalem. He is jeered, mocked and beaten along the way, a path he had not earned, he did not deserve.
- Jesus arrives at Golgotha, the place of the skull, death. He's nailed upon the cross he had dragged through the streets, a cross he didn't deserve. Again, mocked and jeered.
- Then, from that cross where he didn't deserve to be, he addresses those whom he had loved, healed, fed, taught, counseled; some of the same people who now mocked and jeered him.

- He turned his eyes toward heaven and talked to God about these people.

Now let's place ourselves into the scene. What would you have said? What would you have done? Would you have offered forgiveness to them? Or would you have called down fire from heaven to "teach them a lesson."

The fact is Jesus asked His father to forgive them and apparently He did. God forgives us. And he invites us all to forgive each other. It is wise to forgive quickly, *before the sun goes down on your anger*. It is also wise to ask forgiveness quickly. We then begin to walk the path to becoming a healer in conflicts.

Some will say, that's all well and good but Jesus was God and as such He had the ability to do what we really can't do. We are only human.

In addition to the example of Christ on the cross there is the example of Pope John Paul who was shot in an attempted assassination. The assailant, Mehmet Ali Agca, was caught and sent to prison. One day in January, 1984, Pope John Paul walked into the dark cell of Rebibbia prison in Rome to visit the man who tried to kill him. The Pope took Agca's hand, the man who had fired a bullet at his heart, and forgave him.

You might say that the Pope is a professional forgiver and it's therefore expected of him to forgive others. It's the ecclesiastical thing to do. After all, the whole world is watching. Can he afford not to at least give the appearance of forgiving? The argument notwithstanding Pope John Paul is merely a man and his example like that of the man/God Christ Jesus is there for us to emulate.

It's much harder for an ordinary person to forgive, especially when nobody is watching, and there is nothing to gain from it.

Forgiving is the hardest work for love to do - and love's greatest risk. It can make you into a doormat for everyone to walk on - or it can make you to be the greatest manipulator around.

Forgiveness seems "unnatural." Our sense of fairness tells us people should pay for the wrong they do. But forgiving is love's power to break nature's rule.

The following fable (story) illustrates how forgiveness can change the way we live.

The story of the Magic Eyes.

Once upon a time there lived a very good man. His name was Fouke. He always did what was right. He did his duty faithfully; he knew his position in the community and always followed the rules. Everyone respected and honored him.

Fouke had a wife. Her name was Lupita. She was a woman who loved deeply and who longed to be with her husband. But he was very busy. One day he came home to find another man with his wife Lupita. She had been unfaithful.

Fouke, being a righteous man, was faced with a dilemma. Should he throw her out of the house? Or should he forgive Lupita for her unfaithfulness. What would people think if he forgave and kept Lupita? Would they view him as weak or unmanly to tolerate such an offense?

At first, he felt he couldn't forgive her. His sense of righteousness and his sense of justice were in conflict with each other. His inability to forgive became a huge burden and he became stooped and bent over. He lived with great physical and inner (emotional) pain. He felt anguish and anger at the offense of Lupita, his wife.

One day an angel appeared to Fouke and told him he must forgive Lupita. If he didn't forgive her he would die from the anger he harbored. Fouke told the angel he wanted to forgive Lupita, but he could not. He said that each time he remembered Lupita's unfaithfulness his anger and hurt were renewed, like the coals of a fire being fanned into a flame with the coming of a strong wind.

The angel told Fouke that he understood, but Fouke must experience the "miracle of the magic eyes:" Fouke asked the angel what were the "magic eyes?" The Angel said that the miracle of the magic eyes was to see Lupita not as a wife who betrayed him, but as a woman who needed him. Only a new way of looking at the past could change the present. Only then did he admit his own busyness and neglect of his wife. This did play a role in the failure, though it does not justify unfaithfulness. Fouke had to restore the relationship he had with Lupita to its former status, before the unfaithfulness.

So Fouke embarked upon the journey of forgiveness; and his wounded heart was healed, slowly, little by little.

This is only a fable, a story. Forgiveness, however, is real. We can experience forgiveness by asking God to forgive us of our unrighteousness, of our sins and of our unfaithfulness. We can have our sins removed from us "as far as the east is from the west." We can also offer the same kind of forgiveness to others. We must realize that, most often, two people are involved in failures. One

thing leads to another. We react when we have been wronged, or we neglect to do what is needed in the first place. Sometimes it begins with a mistake or misunderstanding, and leads to sin and conflict.

Interact with the story of the Magic Eyes in the box below:

Answer Box # 6

1. What were the magic eyes?
2. How was Fouke's wounded heart healed in the story?
3. Is there a "Lupita" in your life? What do you think you need to do to heal yourself and "Lupita?"



application

Process of Forgiveness

Perhaps you are thinking all this talk about forgiveness sounds good and it seems right but you don't know my situation. You don't know what I've experienced. Such feelings should be tempered with the understanding that forgiveness is a process more than it is an event.

Think about it. While it is true that when we come to God confessing our sin and repenting of it that he forgives us instantaneously, it is also true that we keep coming back to God for forgiveness.

Let's consider a passage that is familiar to most of us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (New International Version, UK)



bible study

The UK version of the New International Version makes clear that God's response to our confession is forgiveness. The second part of the verse (...and purify us from all unrighteousness) infers that forgiveness is not a one time event but an ongoing process. Our point is that the weight of Scripture tends to underscore the truth that we live in a state or process of forgiveness with God. Yes, we are forgiven for past sin(s). But even more remarkable is the truth that God continues to forgive us of unrighteous deeds that we do after we have been forgiven initially. Which also means that we are to live in a constant state of confession, repentance and forgiveness?

I doubt we've said much new here. But let's take this a step further. If we are to confess our sins and live in a state of forgiveness and if as we learned above that the one condition to being forgiven is to forgive others, then does it not follow that we are to live this way with people and not just God?

Louis Smedes is helpful here. He describes four stages in this process of forgiveness: *hurt*, *hate*, *healing* and *reconciliation*. *Hurt* is the initial stage. It is here that this process of learning to forgive begins. Think about it! If one is not hurt how then can one begin to learn to forgive? In this sense one might conclude that hurt is a natural beginning point for becoming a better person for it is he who forgives who has stronger character than one who refuses to do so. *Hate* is the natural consequence of hurt if the one who is hurt can't forgive. Hate is an intense dislike that can easily turn into physical and emotional ill health to say nothing of the negative impact on one's spiritual life. The third stage Smedes mentions is *healing*, a condition that occurs as one's hate is transformed by forgiveness. *Reconciliation* is the fourth stage as healing provides the soil out of which new relationship flower and bloom.

Let's pause a moment here and take some time for *reflection* and *application*. In the box below please interact with what we have learned from the Bible and from Smedes about forgiveness in this last section. You will find numbers down one side of the box and categories across the top: What you are to do is think about events (or people) and consider into which category that relationship or event should be placed. If you are at a hurt stage then right the name/event in that space and so on. The idea is to try to categorize at what stage in the process of forgiveness you are with the hurts in your life.

Answer Box # 7

	Event	Hurt	Hate	Healing	Reconciliation
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					

Was this exercise helpful? What did you



application

learn? Were you able to categorize some people or events that you hadn't really considered before? We suggest that you use this chart as a tool to embark on your journey of forgiveness. Look over your list and start working towards reconciliation as your goal. Don't be discouraged. Remember, forgiveness is a process that

leads ultimately to successful management of conflict.

Consequences of Not Forgiving

We've alluded to some of the benefits of forgiving but there are also serious consequences to not forgiving. J.I. McMillen is a medical doctor. He says in his book, *None of these Diseases*, that when we don't forgive the results will be physical fatigue and loss of sleep.

If it continues, other physical ailments can develop such as colitis, goiters, high blood pressure and more.

Depression is another consequence of an unforgiving spirit toward those who have wronged us. It requires emotional energy to maintain a grudge against another person.

When we hate a person we become in a sense enslaved to them. If the offense was intentional, then often the offender will watch for an opportunity to take advantage of your vulnerability. . . Solomon wrote, "*Better a dish of vegetables with love than the best beef served with hatred.*" (Proverbs 15:17 Moffat)

Hindrances in spiritual development of those around us can develop if we claim to be a Christian leader but do not forgive. We model a wrong relationship to God who forgives so freely. The serious consequences to the generations that follow become a pendulum swing from both extremes of behavior that often result from bitterness.

If we want to imitate His character then forgiveness is at the top of the list in character development. Not forgiving develops the image of the focus of our bitterness toward the offender. Forgiveness develops the image of Christ in us.

Think about it

Answer Box # 8

What consequences can you think of that might well be the result of not having forgiven?
List any that you can think of below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



application

Forgiveness in the Scriptures: An Overview

Forgiveness in the Old Testament

Generally, speaking, forgiveness in the Old Testament is a subdued theme and not dominant as in the New Testament. Forgiveness happens for the most part in the Old Testament between God and Israel and not between Israel and the surrounding nations.

To understand forgiveness in the Old Testament its helpful to

understand what is called *Jewish particularism*, a concept that can be summed up as *Israel as the people of God and God as the god of Israel*. Common to all cultures, especially in the pre-literate history of Israel was the accepted notion that each tribe had its own god or deity. Richard DeRidder in his book, *Disciplining the Nations*, describes the historical development of Jewish cultural and religious life. He explains that the Hebrew people understood the primary relationship between Yahweh (Jehovah) and his people was one of exclusivity. Wrong doing was mostly between Yahweh and his people. When forgiveness is asked for or received it is between Yahweh and his people.

Because Yahweh was therefore the protector and provider for Israel, the “nations” are seen in an adversarial way. That is to say they were enemies of both Israel and Yahweh. So, Israel asks Yahweh to eliminate their enemies. The last thing Israel wants is for Yahweh to forgive them. Forgiveness therefore in the Old Testament is focused on Israel relationship as a nation with Yahweh and not between individuals. This is not to say that no interpersonal relationship existed between individuals and Yahweh. Certainly David’s poetry and songs reflect a personal affection for Yahweh and there are other examples that could be cited. Generally speaking however the relationship was one between the nation and their god. I hasten to add that though is the practical effect and describes what in fact happened, it was not God’s intention that forgiveness be seen or acted upon in this way. A careful reading of Isaiah and other prophets and the Wisdom literature demonstrate God’s desire that Israel be a *light to the Gentiles*. This would have included modeling the entire nature and character of a God forgives (David’s killing of Uriah) and desire for reconciliation (David and King Saul). To summarize there appear instances of forgiveness in the Old Testament (Genesis 45:1-10), but they seem to be the exception more than the norm. The god of the OT, as perceived by Israel, is the avenger, the protector, the provider for Israel.

Forgiveness in the New Testament

Generally speaking, forgiveness in the New Testament adds an interpersonal dimension; or so it appears. The emphasis on forgiveness in the Old Testament was there all along but it becomes more evident in the New Testament. It doesn’t lose its *theocentric* or vertical dimension; but it does emphasize the human or horizontal dimension.

For example Jesus did not *reinterpret* the Law as much as he sought to bring clarify the original intent of the texts and therefore reform Jewish religion. He said, “*I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it*” (Matt 5:17). To fulfill means to “bring to completion,” or to make plain the intended meanings of the Scriptures. He implies in this statement that the understandings they had then were limited and incomplete. His disciples reflected these understandings common to the Jewish people of the time in the questions they asked. Peter’s question for example reveals how unique Jesus’ interpretation was to the people.

Take a moment and read Matthew 18:21-22. Write any observations you make in the space to the right of the text.

21 *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"*

22 *Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. (New International Version)*



Do you see the connection here between the Old and New Testaments? Can you see also that Jesus is taking Peter and others listening in to the conversation into the intended meanings God intended be communicated in centuries past? Our bottom line here is that both Old and New Testaments teach forgiveness but in different contextual situations and in different historical dimensions.

Some Practical Steps to Take

Our discussion to this point has covered many topics including an overview of the development of forgiveness in contemporary Christian culture and to an extent in secular western thought. We established a Biblical foundation for forgiveness and we looked at forgiveness in the Old and New Testaments. Much of our work to this point has been theological and theoretical. Let's turn now to some practical steps we can take. It's not enough to know what it is, where it came from or even what we should do it. We need to practice forgiveness and we need to start now before moving on.

Forgiveness is a key ingredient toward building healthy relationships that are characterized by peace and harmony. As a plant needs adequate water and sunlight to flourish, we too need to be illuminated by the Spirit of God so that we might grow in spirit. Harboring resentment, anger and pride will prevent us from true spiritual growth and hinder managing conflict and reconciliation.

If you find yourself caught up in a situation which you can't seem to move beyond and you find yourself imprisoned in pain and resentment then you need to let that go realizing that God is in charge. We learned in the Spiritual Formation course that we do this through prayer and meditation and thereby allow God's love to flow through us and then from us in words and behaviors. Forgiveness heals us in mind, body and spirit and prepares us to implement the tools/models we will discuss in Unit 4.

It's true. We can't rewrite history nor can we change past experience. But we can learn from it. And when we arrive at peace with ourselves over the past we will find it easier to face others and open the lines of communication that may have been closed due to some behavior, misunderstanding or betrayal.

Please go now to the box below and consider the practical suggestions you find there.

Answer Box #9

1. How much time do you take each day to be with your family? If you don't know then keep a record this week of the minutes/hours you spend each day of week. Submit this log to your professor by email.

Suggestion: Take a break from those things that make your life too busy. Turn off the TV, Radio, computer or whatever it is that monopolizes your time and give that time to be with your family

2. Do you still hang on to past memories of resentment? Make a list of them.

Suggestion: Let go of the past and affirm this statement in your life: *God loves me and forgives me even though there are people who don't.*

3. Are there people whom you have not forgiven? Write their names on separate pieces of paper.

Suggestion: Pray each day for them asking God to forgive them for the offense they made against you. Pray also that God will give you the courage and strength to forgive them. Write a date on your paper when you plan to have forgiven them. Set a. Set a date when you will build a small fire and then put the piece of paper with the name of that person you have had trouble forgiving. Make a spiritual ritual of this by perhaps inviting the “Barry” in your life to be a witness of your intention to forgive.



Summary & Conclusion

What have we learned?

We've learned that forgiveness from a Christian perspective is directed both outward and inward. Unit one and two emphasized knowing ourselves and here we emphasized that forgiveness must also consider those whom we offend.

We determined that forgiveness is the most critical step on the pathway toward resolving interpersonal and ministry conflict.

We learned there are stages of forgiveness and that we can be

helped toward active forgiving by recognizing those stages and where some conflict we have fits into which category

Forgiveness is to some extent counter cultural. This means that forgiveness is not at home in all cultures. At the same Scripture provides the basis for forgiveness and Christians regardless of the cultural context in which they find themselves are not only commanded to forgive but it is a condition Jesus gave for being forgiven. Hence we see again how very important forgiveness is in the process of conflict management.

We learned we can be proactive in forgiveness by taking appropriate steps to forgive others and that we can become healers of others even when we are offended.

We hope the study boxes have been helpful to you in interacting with the material of this chapter. Please go back and review what you did there.

We turn our attention now to models or paradigms for dealing with conflict in Unit 4.

Before going on please go to the box below and do your final assignment for this unit.

Final Assignment

Your final assignment will be your interaction with James Osterhaus, *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict*. Go to the Readings section at the end of this unit and read pages 58 – 66. Be sure to use your margin to the right of this page to jot down significant ideas or thoughts that come to you. These notes will help you formulate your answers to the questions in the answer box below. After you've read the pages assigned take a few moments to mediate and pray and then go to the box below and answer the questions that are there.



application

Final Assignment

1. Have you ever come to a point of conflict in which you felt as Barry did? Please describe briefly the event that made you feel this way.
2. Do you have a “Barry” in your life? ____ If so who is it? _____
If not what prevents you from finding someone who is culturally appropriate and who can serve the function in your life that Elliot served in Barry’s life?
3. You will find these words on page 65; “*Barry, the ones who express the most adoration of you are the most dangerous ones.*” What do you think about this statement? Do you agree? Disagree? State your reasons why.
4. Review the notes you made in the margin of your paper in this unit. How can Barry become his own hero in this situation?
5. What practical steps have you taken to forgive someone or some event that is blocking you from dealing with conflict? List them here.
6. Write your own definition of forgiveness here.
7. How can Barry become his own hero in this situation?

Reading



The following reading is taken from previously mentioned textbooks:

Osterhaus, James P, Joseph M. Jurkowski & Todd A. Hahn. *Thriving through Ministry Conflict: Understanding Your Red & Blue Zones*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan. 2005

We thank the Publishers for granting us permission to integrate the respective chapters of the books in the DAI workbook.

James Osterhaus, et. al., *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict*, pp. 55-66

Chapter 5: The Deepest Water

You sound as if you are really hurting," said Henry. It was early morning after a sleepless night, and Barry had called his old friend, mostly to have someone to talk to who was not involved in his immediate situation.

"It feels like the lowest point of all," Barry replied. "Not only is the situation at the church terrible, but it feels like I have lost Elliott as well. Last night was really painful in every way imaginable."

"I can understand," said Henry. "I can't explain why Elliott does what Elliott does; I only know that he always has other people's good in mind. I guess he is like a surgeon in that way—he has to hurt you to heal you. Not that Elliott is your savior ..."

"I know what you're saying," said Barry. "I know only God can save me in this situation, but I also know that I need to be involved in that process. I'm just not sure what to do next."

Barry tried to work on his upcoming sermon all morning, but he was tired, worried, and distracted. Part of him just wanted to escape, to take the day off and sit in a dark movie theater or find a solitary corner in the public library downtown where he could be alone with his thoughts and concerns.

Midmorning, Stephanie Perkins, the church's youth intern, had asked for a few minutes of Barry's time. He had agreed wearily. Stephanie often came to Barry to talk through issues and struggles she was facing, and she always seemed to be able to lift Barry's spirits through her praise of him. To hear Stephanie tell it, Barry was just short of Jesus in his empathy and skill with people. He knew well of Stephanie's insecurities and personal struggles, but there were times when her words were balm to his soul.

But the lift was always short-lived. After Stephanie had left his office, Barry stared at his laptop screen and realized that his ministry and sense of calling were a mess. A desultory lunch of a wilted fast-food salad at his desk alone did nothing to lift Barry's spirits, nor did the e-mail that arrived in his in-box as he was tossing the remains of his salad in the wastepaper basket.

The e-mail was from Jim, and despite its relatively conciliatory tone, it was a bombshell. Jim wrote that he had been unfair the

previous night in saying that he was speaking for many members of the church without identifying who they were. He said that some people didn't want to be identified, but there were some who took their responsibilities as church leaders seriously and wanted to go on record. And then he named names. Five of the names were people who had been on the committee that had called Barry to First Community.

These people had been Barry's supporters and primary cheer-leaders during his time at First Community. He knew that the changes he had been making had created some tension, but he had assumed that the support of these leaders, many of whom had been at the church for decades, was solid. Nothing he had heard led him to believe otherwise. Hearing now that this was not true devastated Barry.

Near the end of his rope, he called Sophia's cell-phone number. He got her voice mail, then remembered that she had gone to visit a friend of hers a couple of hours away.

Now at the end of his rope, he dialed Elliott Stevens.

Gracious as always, Elliott agreed to meet once again with Barry. Over the phone, as he spilled the story of his last twelve hours, Barry thought he noticed something different in Elliott's responses. He sounded softer, more empathic. And so Barry headed to Elliott's house.

The day was gray and chilly, a lot like Barry's heart. As he walked the circular driveway in front of Elliott's house and climbed the steps to the front door, Barry's legs felt heavy and stiff. He thought that he had never been more tired in his life. Elliott opened the door, took Barry's coat, and seated him in the study. He excused himself and returned a few minutes later with a pot of hot tea and two mugs. Barry accepted the tea with gratitude and sank back into the couch.

"Barry, I am so sorry to see you hurting like this," Elliott began after he sat down. "How can I be of help?"

"Bottom line, Elliott, I'm out of answers and out of hope. This is worse than before. Up till now I have felt that my professional abilities were in question. Now it feels that I as a person, the very core of who I am, is inadequate. I really don't think I feel sorry for myself. But I do feel like a failure with very few options left."

Elliott was quiet for a long time, just looking into Barry's eyes. Barry took several sips of his tea and felt the warmth seep into his bones. Elliott's eyes seemed sad somehow. For the first time, it occurred to Barry that Elliott must have suffered some too in his life.

"Barry, I think most of all you need to rest today," Elliott finally said. "But there are a few things I would like to talk through with you, if you agree."

"Elliott, I'm at the point where I'm ready to try anything. I am at the end of my own resources."

Elliott smiled. "Barry, you have no idea how good it is to hear you say that. It means that you are diving into the deep water. It is important that you remember that things often have to get worse before they can get better, but I do think things are probably at about the lowest point they are going to get for you."

"I truly hope so," sighed Barry.

Elliott stood up and ran his hand through his white hair.

"Okay, Barry. I want to make only a couple of points today. Because I think that the best thing you can do today is to go home and get some sleep ... don't even think about going back to the office. I will get right down to it.

"First, a question for you. How would you say that success in ministry is most often defined, especially in the professional circles

you run in?"

"That's easy," replied Barry. "At its most elemental, pastors judge other pastors a success or failure based on three measures: attendance and membership, rate of church growth, and quality of church facilities. Most of us know that there are spiritual dynamics that transcend these things—some of the healthiest churches are the small to midsized ones. But at the end of the day, the winners have rapidly growing churches and are either in a building program or have a new, modern facility.

"Another thing," Barry continued, "is that when people talk church growth these days; it is mostly of a certain kind, at least for suburban pastors like me. The true mark of success is reaching young families. Pastors who are seen to be successful always talk about how many kids are running around in their churches."

"That's pretty much what I thought," said Elliott. "Now, you know better than this. I am aware of that. But, all other things being equal, you would rather pastor a healthy church with significant growth and a nice new facility than a healthy church with a worn-down building and growth that has peaked at 250. Is that fair to say?"

"I don't like to say yes, but yes," answered Barry.

"That's okay," said Elliott with a chuckle. "It is a very human reaction. But the point remains that even if we know better, we often judge ourselves by the prevalent standards around us. That's hard enough. But in your case, Barry—and you are nowhere near alone in this—combine those expectations with elements of your personal story and the combination can be emotionally lethal."

"What part of my personal story?" asked Barry.

Elliott fiddled absentmindedly with the pens on his desk, then walked around the desk and sat down in his chair, facing Barry again.

"The part of your story in which you have received messages that you are not adequate as a man. That if people really knew you, they would see that you are a fraud, that you don't have what it takes in spite of how you might look on the outside. You have received that message at a number of points in your life, beginning in childhood, and I believe you have internalized it, as so many men do."

Elliott continued, "And when we internalize that message, it leads us into behaviors that are destructive to ourselves and those around us. Worst of all, it blinds us to the very things which could heal us.

"Barry, I want you to consider the possibility that Jim represents for you that core message—that you are not adequate, that you don't have what it takes, that if people knew the truth, they would know you are a fraud."

"I am willing to go with that, at least for a minute, Elliott," Barry said. "But what does it mean?"

"Great question, Barry. What it means is that instead of holding up your fears and insecurities to the light where they can be exposed and healed, you are transferring them over to Jim Grendell. Jim is outside of yourself, so you can take those anxieties and despise them in another person because it is safer than seeing them in yourself.

"But this creates an insurmountable problem because you don't get healed and you miss the real lesson Jim has for you."

"Elliott, you mentioned last time that Jim could be the best teacher I ever had. I Red Zoned over that idea, as you would say, but I am ready to hear what you meant."

"Barry, you are showing real courage now," Elliott replied. "You are in the crucible and you are ready to learn. I believe that as bad as things are right now, they are about to get better. Sometimes things have to get worse before they can get better, and you are the lowest you will go, I believe. I think you can take heart in that," Elliott said with a smile.

"Barry, remember one of the things we learned together, what I have referred to as a mantra of mine?"

"Yeah. Resistance is your ally," Barry answered.

"That's right," Elliott said. "And that is where Jim can be your teacher. Jim exposes in you the doubts and darkness you fear. He has done you a great favor by behaving in ways that have brought these things out in you. You have met real resistance in Jim. And this is good, because what resistance is best at is showing us that the strategies we are employing are not working."

Elliott stood up again and leaned against his desk. "When we meet resistance, we can go one of three ways, Barry. We can ignore it and push ourselves deeper in denial. We can wage war against it, as you have been doing. Or we can do what I believe you are about to do: we can pause and reflect on why what we are doing is not working and then change our approach."

"What exactly am I doing that is not working?" Barry asked.

"You are trying to compensate for your own self-doubt by papering it over with achievement. And you are missing the opportunity to care for people on a deep level because you have not been honest with yourself at the deepest level.

"Here's the thing, Barry. Jim is really not your problem. He is a symbol of the congregation as a whole, especially the older members. He is there to show you something very important. He is teaching you that the resistance you have felt at the church is not about selfishness or lack of willingness to change—they know they need change or they would not have hired you—but it is about their need to feel that they still matter, that they have a contribution to make in spite of the fact that they are smaller and less consequential than they used to be.

"As much as they want you to minister to others, Barry, you can't do it without them. And they are willing. But the truth is that they need ministry first."

Elliott paused to allow this to sink in. After a few seconds, Barry began to speak slowly. "But I am afraid that if I do that, they will just become more inwardly focused and then I won't ... we won't ..." Barry's voice trailed off

"What are you afraid of, Barry?" Elliott asked with real tenderness.

"I'm afraid that if that happens, we won't grow and we will miss out on the chance to really have an impact on the community," Barry replied.

Still with consummate tenderness, Elliott said, "And, Barry, you are afraid that you will not be deemed a success, in your own eyes or in the eyes of others, aren't you?"

Barry's eyes began to sting and he lowered his head to hide the beginning of tears. "I'm afraid that I won't be good enough, that I won't do all that God wants me to do. I'm afraid that I will disappoint him and let him down."

"And so you fight that tooth and nail, fight Jim, fight resistance, fight with your last breath the fear that you won't measure up," Elliott said. "Barry, don't you think it is time to stop fighting and to start pastoring? Don't you think it's time to face up to your shadow side rather than fight it or ignore it? Don't you think God will meet you there and begin to heal you if you ask him? This is what Jim is teaching you, Barry. He is teaching you to be honest with God and your-self, to give up the ambitions that are a product of your own fears and instead to be ambitious for loving God and those in your life as well."

Elliott sat down in his chair and slumped in it. He seemed tired. The two men said nothing for many minutes.

Finally Elliott spoke. "Barry, are you completely spent or do you have a little more time?"

"I am totally spent, but I have more time. I know this is important," Barry answered.

"We have talked a lot about your projecting your shadow side onto Jim," Elliott began, "and how important it is to believe that he is actually your ally and teacher if you will pay attention to the fact that your strategy is not working. But it is also important that you know that other people will project things onto you as well and that the damage from that can be just as great as your own projection."

"I know that members of a congregation project onto their pastors," said Barry. "But I would love to hear your take as well."

"Barry, congregations tend to project two things onto their pastors: God, and their own fathers—or in the case of a female pastor, their mothers. When things are going well, the pastor can feel on top of the world. It is as if God has taken on tangible form for the congregation, and it is as if they now have the perfect father, regard-less of how flawed their real fathers were."

Elliott leaned forward with an effort, but his eyes were alive again.

"This is the most dangerous time for a pastor. When you begin to believe the things adoring people are saying about you, you run the risk of deceiving yourself and them, and in many ways you are set up for a fall. It is a fact that many pastors carry feelings of inadequacy and a fear of failure within them. And those adoring words can feel like balm to a pastor's soul, especially since most people expect their pastor to care for them and never really stop to ask if the pastor is being cared for. This is the confusion people experience between role and self. Your role as pastor gathers the praise and the projected blame. Those words of praise and those biting criticisms aren't about you personally; they're directed at your role. The only way these words from the congregation can be about you is if you let them be about you.

"The pastor, missing the distinction between role and self, can begin to depend on this affirmation. For many it becomes an intoxicant, and they lose perspective, and they are set up for a world of hurt. I don't need to lay that out for you, do I, Barry?"

Barry shook his head. He had several friends who had suffered greatly by trying to salve their emotional pain in inappropriate ways.

"You have to realize that the adoring words are not really about you at all, even if the person saying them may be legitimately fond of you. All pastors have to realize that they are the repositories of the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of their followers. This becomes unhealthy when a person attaches to you because they believe you can provide for them a quality of relationship they have not experienced before. This is often because of unsatisfying adult relationships, but more often than not it goes back to childhood experiences in which the person was not cared for or loved well, perhaps by a parent who was preoccupied or was incapable of expressing intimate emotions."

Barry nodded. He was thinking of how his interactions with Stephanie, his adoring youth intern, often gave him a short-lived emotional lift.

Elliott seemed to read Barry's mind. "I think in your own case, there is a staff intern who plays this role in your life. Fortunately, you are wise enough to see this, I believe. You see intuitively that the more needy a person is, the more that person will project onto you the expectation of the perfect parent, the one who will heal you. Your example is the five people named in Jims e-mail this morning. As hard as this is to say, Barry, the ones who express the most adoration of you are the most dangerous ones.

"It is not that they are bad people," Elliott emphasized, "or that they are out to do you harm. The danger comes when you start to believe that what they are seeing in you is actually you. Because when that adoration wears off and the pastor is revealed to be an imperfect person just like everyone else, the ones who adored the pastor before are often the ones to turn most viciously against him. And often this is too much for pastors to handle emotionally"

Elliott moved to his cherry cabinet, opened it, grabbed a marker from his desk, and wrote on the whiteboard:

Role versus Self

He then wrote:

When someone adores you, it is about their neediness, not about your spectacular qualities

"Barry, I know that you don't see adoration as your problem right now," said Elliott with an understanding smile. "But the adoration is the flip side of the anger you are now facing. They are not different things but rather part of the same unhealthy process."

Barry could not remember when he last felt energized. Now he felt more tired than ever. But he also felt something stirring in his soul, something fiery and hopeful.

"Elliott, I am bone tired and I need to go. But I think I understand. The struggles are really not about Jim at all, and I have let my distraction with that relationship obscure the fact that the problem is in me and that I can't address the problems of others until I see this for what it is."

Elliott nodded in agreement, not quite suppressing an enthusiastic smile.

Barry said, "I feel like I have crossed a bridge of some kind. Some-how I feel like I'm starting to see myself and the situation I find myself in with some clarity. It's not crystal clear yet, but it is coining into focus. I really do have to see that resistance is my ally and then live as if I actually believe it."

Elliott escorted Barry to the front door. "You used the metaphor of a bridge, Barry. As we say goodbye, I will use another metaphor. I believe that today you chose to dive into the deep water. It was the best of decisions, my friend."

Conflict Management & Resolution

Unit 4

How Do Christian Leaders Deal with Conflict



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Unit 4 How Do Christian Leaders Deal with Conflict?

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Readings:

Osterhaus, James. *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict*. Pp. 26-36

Elmer, Duane. *Cross-Cultural Conflict*. Pp. 33-44

Learning Objectives:

- Examine oneself as the first step in dealing with conflict
- Extrapolate issues and approaches from case studies in conflict.
- Examine different approaches how to manage Conflict
- Study Scripture paradigms in Conflict
- Identify personal and ministry conflict issues.
- Identify paradigms for dealing with conflict

Introduction

We learned in Unit 1 that conflict is inevitable and that in fact positive outcomes can and do accrue to situations of conflict. We also learned that there are ways to deal with it. Then we learned in Unit 2 that there are hindrances or obstacles to managing conflict and we examined some of those and suggested ways to overcome them. We talked about forgiveness and the role it has in conflict and resolution in Unit 3. This Unit will help you begin to move into managing conflict and improving interpersonal relationships. You can overcome conflict and you can become an example to those whom you lead.

We will investigate first of all “who you are” in order to understand your starting point. And then we will investigate some paradigms for encountering conflict with a view how best to deal with it.

Who Are You?

We begin by asking “who are you?” Our goal here is not to be overly introspective nor will we move into psychoanalysis. Because you are one of the participants in conflict it’s important to begin with oneself. The only person we have power over is ourselves. It’s difficult to change others but we have the ability and the responsibility to control ourselves.

Think About It!

Let’s pause to reflect upon five basic questions about yourself and as you reflect on them write your answers in the margin to the right of the box. Take fifteen (15) minutes to do this. Your reflection might help you begin to focus on what part you play in conflict:

Answer Box # 1

1. What patterns have you seen in your behavior over the years that repeat themselves?
2. Have you observed conflict of the same type seemingly repeating itself but with different people and in different or new situations?
3. Do you end up feeling badly about what has happened but find that you never seem to be able to resolve the issues in conflicts you have had?
4. Do you find anger, harshness, criticism and rigidity in your responses to others?
5. Could it be that these responses contribute to poor relationships and indeed might well be the source of conflict in your life?



learning

To begin its good to be reminded that Christians, as the name implies, are “Christ’s ones.” The apostle Paul taught the Colossian believers that they were “in Christ,” and that this was their profound hope both now and for eternity (Colossians 1:27). Neil T. Anderson expounds Paul’s teachings in these words: “Freedom in Christ from demonic deception and interference is the inheritance of every believer” (1993:185). Anderson develops this theme in his other books, especially *Victory Over Darkness*.

An interesting and relevant contrast of these two books is that in *Bondage Breaker* Anderson says demonic power while in *Victory Over Darkness* he emphasizes being in Christ.” Of course both emphases are valid and herein lay the value of citing both of Anderson’s books. It’s worth noting that dealing with the “demonic” cannot be separated from the “in Christ” teachings of Paul.

What does this mean? For our purposes here it means that before we deal with any issue, weather personal or corporate conflict, we must first recognize that being in Christ is the first and most important acknowledgment we make about our selves. Anderson goes a step further. He suggests that finding our identity in Christ has a metamorphosing effect; we are changed into “saints,” a term not be confused with the concept of “sainthood” in organized religion. He is speaking about spiritual sainthood.

Think About It!



Answer Box # 2

Take 5 minutes and reflect upon your name. What does it mean?

Now, fill in the blank space in the sentence below and say this prayer to God:

Dear Jesus, thank you that because I have invited you into my life that my name has now been changed. My name is now *Saint* _____

We’ve acknowledged now that Christians are “saints” in a deeply spiritual sense. Obviously this doesn’t mean that we have been given a formal religious status. It means that being in Christ we have recourse to draw from Him all that we need to live and work in this world. Paul also said that being in Christ is the means by which we accomplish anything (II Corinthians 5:17). It doesn’t mean we never make mistakes. Being in Christ is not a flawless condition. Provision is made for forgiveness for sin and wrongdoing (I John 1:9).

With this in mind and it’s helpful to *acknowledge your part in a conflict situation*, which is to admit your participation in the evolution of the conflict. Generally we don’t like to admit negative involvement on our part. Our tendency is to deny we had any part in it or to defend ourselves and play the “blame game.”

Another factor that contributes to delaying looking inwardly for reasons or sources of conflict is one quite natural to all human beings. We tend to interpret events through our **cultural filters**. These filters are made up of past experiences, expectations of what we have come to believe is possible, our values (personal and cultural), our biases and prejudices. Communications theory affirms that virtually all events come to us through these cultural expectations

Charles Kraft speaks of *receptor oriented communication* in his book *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (1996:16, 17). He explains that our natural tendency as human beings is to focus primarily upon our cultural situation and upon the message to be

communicated. Moreover, Kraft emphasizes that effective communication takes place when the sender of a message focuses upon the context of the receptor and seeks to package the message using forms (words, metaphors, concepts, etc) that are familiar to the receptor.

All too often the opposite occurs. Cultural filters interpret to the receptor of message information that confuses and even changes the meanings without our being aware of it. The primary reason for this condition is that our cultural filters are in effect a composite of our worldview. These filters are composed of:

- experiences, past & present
- beliefs about what is possible and not possible
- environmental conditioning
- parental and family upbringing
- cultural cosmology (belief systems)

It is through this filter that we both send and receive messages. The effect is much like a pair of UV sunglasses with colored lenses. If the lens is blue then the appearance of that being viewed will have a blue tint to it. If it is green then it will have a green tint and so on. The point is that though the appearance is one thing in reality it is another.

An example of this communicational misinterpretation is illustrated by an observation I made in Thailand. A western missionary who had lived in Thailand for many years wanted to prevent thieves from breaking into his house acquired two fierce guard dogs and then erected tall chain-link fences around his property. To enter the gate for a visit was to take one's life into one's own hands!

I hasten to add that this missionary had been effective and had many friends in the local culture. He was respected and admired. So, what is wrong with this picture? In Thai culture, especially in rural areas, dogs do not "guard" in the same sense as they do in American culture. Thai dogs bark and hiss at new people who enter a village but seldom attack or bite whereas in America guard dogs, at least some are trained to attack. Two different meanings attend the same form in these respective cultures. The missionary assumed he was communicating "security" while in fact he was communicating that people were not welcome to his home.

My point in citing this experience is to emphasize the importance of keeping the receptor's frame of reference clearly in focus.

Having established the need to focus on receptors let us now return to the conversation of conflict and our responsibility in it. Not all conflict is generated by others. We have a part in it. However our tendency is to deny our part. As believers who live intentionally, seeking the goal of a clear conscience in all things and establishing right relationship with everyone, and living at peace as much as is possible with others, we can then, in the right sense, view ourselves as the hero in relationships. We can help rescue others who are caught in the bondage of not knowing how to manage conflict biblically.

Through the struggle of forgiving others, humbling ourselves, and controlling ourselves, we find that we can be a peacemaker in more and more responsible situations and events. Continuing to live as Christ did, seeing conflict through His eyes, and His intention, will establish peace.

But when indeed, we do deny our part in the conflict we do this in several ways. We may want to *start over* by getting rid of the relationship or leave the situation of conflict. This approach seems the easiest way but in reality it's the most difficult in the long run and one you likely cannot do anyway. This approach requires abrupt and sometimes traumatic things such as changing jobs, locations, taking a different position or ending relationships.

Two significant problems, among others, attend this approach. *First*, wherever you go, you always take yourself with you. If the problem is with you in one place, it will be with you in the next place. That is why it is good to fix yourself first. The *second* problem is that this approach requires the burning of bridges. Burning a bridge amounts to cutting yourself off from a situation of conflict in such a way that you cannot go back. A very good friend and mentor advised me once, “Tom, never burn your bridges. You never know when you might need to cross them again.” People come around again and again in our lives. We cannot hide. Better to heal and restore as soon as possible. Then we have nothing to be ashamed of in the future. It is a beautiful thing to say, if the subject comes up again, “We have been restored.” “We have been reconciled.” “He apologized to me and we are moving on beyond that problem.”

A more effective, though in some ways more painful and difficult approach, is to *look inside you*. Looking inside yourself can help alleviate the conditions of conflict if you are honest with yourself, searching your soul in the conflict, asking yourself and God in prayer, “What part do I play in this conflict?”

A Closer Look at Yourself

Let us begin with self-examination looking at the basic core of your person. Who are you?

To look at yourself honestly involves knowing what *kind* of person you want to be, what *quality* person you want to be, and settle for nothing less than the quality of life and relationship you want. This will sometimes mean taking charge and drawing boundaries. Other times it will mean giving up anger, resentment, control and negative patterns. You must get a very clear picture of where you are going.

Knowing yourself and being true to oneself is a first step toward managing conflict. Find the person within you which totally defines you. You are Born Again and redeemed by the Almighty God. He has a plan for your life. He knows you and loves you. He has given you a new heart. So who are you?

With this in mind, take a few moments and look over the following list of words in the columns below. These words represent a little exercise in learning a bit about who you are. Circle the words that describe you. Have you ever thought of yourself in this way or labeled yourself? Has anyone ever said this about you? Be honest, search your heart and then circle any possibilities.

impulsive
fun
serious
firm
determined
kind-hearted
adventurous
enthusiastic
hurt
put down
frightened
cautious

doing good deeds
loving spirit
procrastinating
crafty
cautious
prudent
manipulative
fearful
ingenuity
careful
unskilled
wary

victim
detached
abused
focused
talkative
sarcastic
calm
virtuoso
listener
critical
genius
helpful

grateful
caustic
avoiding
dependable
stubborn
excited

authentic
moody
genuine
honorable
respectable



learning

strong-willed	free-spirited	hidden	frugal
shy	possibility thinker	brooding	intimacy
resolute	idealist	greedy	skeptical
generous	realist	workaholic	spontaneous
prayerful	leader	distracted	mentor
judging	busy	preoccupied	supervising
honest	boss	guardian	leery
true to self	wise	trusting	audacious
playful	firm	achiever	adventure
rational	team-player	handsome	regulatory
random	forgiving	beautiful	mediating
compassionate	pure in heart	clumsy	adaptive
altruistic	naive	dumb	unique
pragmatic	sloppy	dull	fervent
efficient	late	foolish	serene
dutiful	follower	dreamer	bold
diligent	angry	achiever	feeling
practical	silly	competitive	safe
inspiring	careless	happy	critical
detached	sensitive	sad	harsh
bold	mean	depressed	
independent	romantic	wasteful	
formal	lazy	flexible	

Done? Did you circle the words that seem to describe you? Good! You can now go to the text in the side bar below and do one more exercise.

Go through the list again to determine which of these traits might be helpful in resolving conflict? **Put a star beside any helpful traits.**

Which ones might tend to aggravate conflict? **Put an X beside these traits.**

Which words might work in resolution of a conflict depending on the people involved?

Think of your own list. It is easier to "label" others than it is to name our own traits honestly. Write down traits of others in the margin to the right of this text and prayerfully ask God if these are your traits as well.

Think of how you can understand yourself in relationship to others using these traits and others which you think of yourself. Often the very things we dislike in other people are behaviors we have ourselves. Be honest and check it out. Perhaps you have at one point been positive, optimistic, and hopeful about a relationship. When that degenerates into conflict and unhappiness, struggle and pain, you need to find your way back to the intention and purposes of your heart.

Think About It!

Why do some people treat you with disrespect? Have you given them a clue that you are not worthy of respect? When did you come to disrespect yourself? God Himself has the greatest respect for you. For some reason that sense of self-respect deteriorates when relationships break down. Then we find that our "worst self" comes forward and operates in a negative manner. This is what James Osterhaus calls the RED ZONE.

Reading: *Osterhaus, Thriving Through Ministry Conflict (at end of this unit)*

Answer Box #3

Go to the Readings at the end of this unit, and read the selection from *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict* Finished? Ok, now answer the following questions that Osterhaus raises:

1. I am more of a "Red Zone" leader than a "Blue Zone leader"
2. What have I done this week that demonstrates red zone behavior?
3. What have I done this week that demonstrates blue zone behavior?



To be honest and face the truth about ourselves, we must deal with that negative response we give to our world. Somehow to get to the person God wants us to be, we must scrape away at the self-doubt, self-criticizing, fearful, negative person we are in our worst moments. This means, returning to the One who gives us a new heart.

Osterhaus affirms "the problem is you, so know yourself" (ibid:101). The statistics he cites and which I quote below will be different from culture to culture but they are likely not too far distant from where most of us live. He cites a survey published in *Your Church magazine* stating reasons pastors leave the ministry or are pressured to resign:

- 46% conflict in *vision* between themselves and their church.
- 38% *personality conflicts* with board members, leadership in the church.
- 32% *unrealistic expectations* placed upon them.
- 24% lack of clear *expectations*.
- 22% *theological* differences. (ibid:101)

Another survey appeared in *Leadership Journal*, eight years following the study cited above. In that report the respondents were asked the causes of their conflict. An overwhelming percentage (95%) admitted they experienced serious conflict (ibid:102). These respondents listed the following sources of conflict:

- 85% control issues
- 64% vision/direction
- 43% leadership changes
- 39% pastoral style
- 33% financial issues
- 23% theology/doctrinal issues
- 22% cultural issues
- 16% other

On the surface one might doubt the relevance of these studies in a non western environment. While it's true that these percentages represent a western context and while it also true that the values would no doubt vary in non western our experience in other cultures attest to the continuity of these categories among disparate cultures. However, it is good for you to think more culture specific at this point.

Think About It!

Answer Box # 4

List below the categories of conflict from the lists above that seem relevant to your situation:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.



application

What do these statistics have to do with you? And with your leadership? You don't have to become another statistic! You have

the power through Christ to make a choice to be the strong person who deals with others in a manner which portrays not only His love for them, but also His love for you. This attitude gives dignity and health to you and to the relationships you have with others. It is the quiet calm we tap into because we know where we have come from, we know who we are and we know where we are going in Christ Himself.

To reconcile, to recover, to heal, to have resolution, we must first be healed. Conflict brings damage to our souls, our minds, our hearts, and eventually to our bodies. It hurts those around us. One example is divorce that deeply hurts at least twelve people. The conflict is between two people, but the children, the grandparents, the friends, the siblings, the entire extended family all get hurt. In organizations, the same is true. Conflict is painful.

So, during and after conflict, we who are leaders, who engage in conflict, must find a place of healing, a place of rest and a place to land *softly*.

To be healed we need to go to the Healer, the One who *knows*, the One who bears our burdens, and carries our sorrows and we must be honest.

Here are some thoughts to consider prayerfully:

- Honesty will require change on our part.
- Conflict brings out our defenses. Honestly, try to put away your defenses, your tools, your weapons. Lay them down.
- Conflict arouses the memory of former conflicts and brings them to the forefront of our hearts *again*.
- Conflict brings out our worst self, our worst behavior, our anger, rejection and pain.
- Surrender these defenses, these memories and these behaviors in exchange for tools to work through the conflict.

The following rhetorical questions are for your reflection/meditation. You likely don't have a ready answer as you read through them. But as you meditate on them they can help you find honesty and liberty in conflict.

Answer Box # 5

1. Can you be real and honest about your self and how you got into this conflict?
2. Can you decide that you would rather have unity than prove your point?
3. Can you stop playing the blame game, and decide to make it a new day?
4. Can you be willing to change your position how to approach and engage the opposing person(s)?
5. Can you find a new measurement for success in this relationship?

Can you understand the conflict, at least in part, from the other person's point of view?

Answer the questions above in a conflict you are or have been involved with. Seek to be totally honest with yourself and with God.



application

Models to Help Deal with Conflict

We turn now to approaches or models to help deal with conflict. In preparation for this section you will need to **stop here** and go to the end of unit readings and read the chapter from Duane Elmer's *Cross-Cultural Conflict* at the end of this Unit.



After you have read those pages, return and continue with our study.

The literature about conflict and resolution has been growing in recent years. Much of this scholarship is being produced in Western cultures but the nature of conflict is multi cultural. More will be said of this in Unit 6 but its important that you understand here that it is this multicultural world of conflict that makes relevant a cross-cultural approach in this course.

Duane Elmer presents paradigms or models of encounter that we will adapt to our study here. The first is one that is used widely in both western and non western cultures. Many Westerners are caught in the trap of a win-lose mentality.

WIN-LOSE

Win-lose cultures are highly competitive. They believe there is only one right way to approach most issues. Everything in their thinking is categorized accordingly. This is especially true if a person has positional or personal power. People in these cultures are often willing to sacrifice relationships to get their way. They tend to be assertive, especially when challenged. They are willing to sacrifice everything to win.

We need to insert a note of reminder here. You might recall the emphasis in the Ethics course on *knowledge* (epistemology) and how it is acquired. How we learn is conditioned to various levels of degrees in the wake of *post modernity* or *post enlightenment* thinking.

A high degree of *relativism* is evident in the thinking processes of *post modern* thinkers. So, to the extent that your world can be described as *post modern* or *post enlightenment*, then to that degree there might well be less of a tendency toward a *win-lose* strategy.

Moreover, those who hold to a *rationalist* or *modern* approach to epistemology will tend more toward a win-lose paradigm. Why? Well, primarily it is because of the emphasis on authority of Scripture and the centrality of Scripture to doctrine for determining faith and practice in daily life. There is more absolutist thinking required of those who hold to this epistemology.

Win-lose people seldom see themselves in this light of relativity. Others see it quite clearly. Both (modern and post modern) need to learn to distinguish what issues are major, the ones one is willing to die for, and what issues are minor, the ones one is willing to release. Maturity brings about wisdom that helps all people determine what they should fight for and seek to win.

There are issues that are not negotiable, regardless of the win-lose approach, and there will always be a "winning side" regardless of the other person's position. Some examples include:

- pre-marital or extramarital sex
- the death, burial and resurrection of Christ
- abortion, euthanasia, torture
- goals, values and ideals for our family.

When I (Sandi) was a child I heard a sermon by a conference speaker. I don't remember many details of his message but one thing I have not forgotten. He said, "When Scripture is clear teach it clearly. When Scripture is vague, teach it vaguely." His was good

counsel. For example we don't have clear instruction in Scripture about credit cards, cigarettes, or body piercings. But Scripture does contain guiding principles that are very clear. Teach those clearly.

Answer Box # 6

Describe briefly in this box an event or experience in which you used the win-lose strategy.

State the outcome. Was it largely positive? Negative?

What did you learn from this experience?



application

AVOIDANCE

Elmer says that the person "who tries to manage conflict by avoiding it believes that differences are bad, they always cause hard feelings and broken relationships, and no good can come from confronting conflict" (Elmer1993:36).

These people do not realize that conflict can be positive. We want to emphasize the importance of conflict in preserving important goals, values and ideas and relationships. The person who responds with avoidance loses on both counts. They end up without influence on important decisions, and have superficial relationships. That is not what they want.

Overall, responding to conflict with avoidance leaves everyone disappointed. People who avoid problems that might lead to conflict situations usually limit themselves to only one way to handle conflict. Those who naturally tend toward avoidance are urged to consider other options and deal with the lack of value you give yourself in living in community.

There are times when avoiding conflict or withdrawing is a good idea, but if it is your pattern, and regular habit, then it is good to consider other options. How does one determine when to try another option other than avoidance? It's not always an easy call but when or if the problem is trivial and it really doesn't make much difference one way or the other then it's best not to waste time and emotional energy on it. Parents need to remember this with their children in order not to over-parent. Leaving others to learn by letting them make personal choices and then experience their natural consequences is part of leadership. But, that is not what we are talking about here.

A time to employ avoidance as a legitimate approach to conflict management or resolution is when the potential consequences are too serious. For example, in a situation where a real threat of death or violence is involved, it is better to avoid the violence if possible

than to choose the consequences of serious injury or death.

If you avoid conflict ask yourself if you are doing it with maturity and wisdom, or is it a signal of unwillingness to discuss important issues or a refusal to take a stand on a significant decision that will benefit you and your community.

Answer Box # 7

Describe briefly in this box an event or experience in which you used the Avoidance strategy.

State the outcome. Was it largely positive? Negative?

What did you learn from this experience?



application

Giving in

Many people manage conflict by just giving in. They view themselves as compliant, and feel that nothing is accomplished by disagreement. The relationship is most important, so they find ways to accommodate the other person involved.

One might ask if there is a problem with this. Also, is it different from avoidance? These people often do have good relationships, but they do not contribute as much to the organization as they might if they were more willing to take a stand.

Productivity happens and creativity blossoms when more than one person contributes. This does cause friction, but it also is more powerful and more useful.

In a marriage if one person is compliant and gives in regularly, the other person must bear the load of decision-making and also making mistakes. Sometimes this causes depression in the one who always gives in and seems as if one person is not developing personally to the extent that God intends.

This couple is not as productive and will not accomplish as much as a couple that challenges each other. It can bring harmony and should be considered more often by those who are on the win-lose path, and those who have forceful dominant personalities. If you find yourself always giving-in try to be more assertive and expressive. It will be good for everyone.

Answer Box #8

Describe briefly in this box an event or experience in which you used the giving-in strategy.

State the outcome. Was it largely positive? Negative?

What did you learn from this experience?

Compromise

This person believes that it is impossible to have everything, so everyone will have to give a little and get a little. Our daughter is often in this category and it is interesting for us to watch her as a wife and school teacher. She is a great negotiator. She will determine what another person really wants and try to get that for them. On the other side, she will try to get what she wants.

This takes time and effort. Sometimes everything has to stop while she works out a compromise with someone. In the end, she is determined that everyone is happy.

When my mother died it was interesting to see how her belongings were handled. The seven siblings agreed in the end, we all got something we really treasured. Being that my mother had eighty descendants it was an excellent method of managing what could have been a conflict. As we know inheritance issues often divide family for the following generations. It is a good time to find an option that works! Avoidance and win-lose would certainly not be good methods in dividing an inheritance.

Answer Box #9

Describe briefly in this box an event or experience in which you used the compromise strategy.

State the outcome. Was it largely positive? Negative?

What did you learn from this experience?



application

WIN-WIN

An option that Elmer mentions as a final and often best method is that which he calls "carefronting" (ibid:42). For our purposes we will call it *win-win* in order to contrast it with the win-lose option. To him this means approaching a conflict issue with the goal being that both parties win; hence it becomes a win-win solution.

With this approach neither party loses anything important to them and the relationship does not suffer. Several conditions must be met to achieve a mutual win situation.

1. The two parties meet and face each other with open honesty.
2. The each must have a commitment to preserve the relationship.
3. Each person dispassionately explains the value/goals that they wish to protect.
4. Together they find a solution so that each can win what they desire most.
5. They must do this with reason, and with emotions under control.
6. They must both separate the issue from the person involved and speak objectively.
7. Neither will be satisfied with a solution until the other is also completely at peace.

Striving for the win-win situation is promoted in businesses seminars and family conflict resolution for many years. It is a major step in managing conflicts and particularly helpful in times of separation and division of goals.

Think about it

Answer Box # 10

Circle the strategy(ies) you have used to either manage the conflict or bring resolution to it and then circle the number (#1 being least effective to #5 being most effective) that best describes the degree of effectiveness.

1. Win/Lose	1	2	3	4	5
2. Avoidance	1	2	3	4	5
3. Giving-In	1	2	3	4	5
4. Compromise	1	2	3	4	5
5. Win/Win	1	2	3	4	5



application

Choose a conflict in which you need help. Walk through a meeting with the person on the other side of the conflict. Take each step listed above and see if you can come to a working agreement in a win-win situation.

Answer Box # 11

Describe a current conflict situation you need help to resolve or manage. Describe the situation in the space below.

Recapping What We've Learned so far:

Let's recap what we've learned and then make an attempt at forming a "pre-solution" to your conflict situation.

First let's recap what we have learned. We have learned 5 common strategies many people use in trying to manage conflict. We have learned both positive and negative aspects of each. You have selected a personal sample conflict issue you are currently dealing with and you have analyzed it, however briefly and simplistically, to determine the measure of effectiveness you have had given the strategies you have employed to this point. You also have some idea, however vague and incomplete it is, which strategy has rendered you the most effectiveness.

Now let's proceed to an attempt to apply what we have learned in the box below

Answer Box # 12

In this box please select any combination of strategies you decide are relevant to the conflict situation you described above and write an essay describing how to manage or bring to resolution the conflict.



learning

Case Study: Bokondini Electric Company.

We turn now to a real life event in which conflict is demonstrated in a dramatic way. Read the following case study and, as you did in previous cases, take notes in the margin to the right of your paper. Take note of the characters/persons, events and issues so that the facts don't escape you. You will be asked to interact with the case.

Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) established a base in Bokondini in the remote highlands of Irian Jaya, Indonesia. A German made Voltage Regulator is one of the electrical components of a hydro-electric generator that served the MAF community and the airfield.

MAF moved away and the hydro system lay dormant for many years. Recently Scotty and Heidi moved to Bokondini to establish a school and work in community development in the area. Immediately the officials asked if they would repair the hydro system and handle the utilities of the community. Scotty responded that these matters were the responsibility of the government but he agreed to handle the electrical part of the community needs with a trainee named Ellu.

A community meeting was called for the purpose of educating the people about electricity and to implement a consequence system for those who do not pay. The system was ready but had to be paid for by the clients. It was agreed that each of 96 villagers would pay between \$2.00 (US) and \$4.00 per month for electrical service. This arrangement was more convenient, clean and a huge savings over the use of kerosene and candles which would have cost between \$10.00 - \$15.00.

The community agreed that there would have to be consequences if people did not pay. For those who failed to pay after one warning and an extension of one month of grace, the electricity would be cut off for one year. All were in agreement and happily went home to turn on the lights.

Less than a year later, Scotty went six times to the homes of people who were not paying to warn them of the consequences. Another community meeting was called with 70 in attendance to discuss what should be done with the purpose of gaining consensus regarding delinquent bills. Not surprisingly, those who did not pay were government employees, policemen, two military men, the head of the church district, and three local villagers, a total of twelve people.

Knowing that the Indonesian political and military leaders abuse their privileges in this culture and that the Indonesians govern tribal people, this was a difficult rule to enforce. Scotty asked the people, "What will you do when they come to kill me?" They answered, "we are with you, don't worry, this is our decision not yours."

As everyone left the MAF hanger where the meeting had been held, the police were waiting with their automatic weapons held in a threatening posture. Scotty's recent supporters disappeared like cockroaches when the lights come on. Only Ellu remained with Scotty.

Then, the police put down their weapons and politely asked if there was a way they could pay a fine and continue with the electrical service.

Scotty and Ellu viewed this as a respectful show of force with an offer to pay a bribe and alter the course of justice. This method is typical throughout the area and has repeated itself again and again causing anxiety to the community because of the threat of weapons.

Most everything was handled this way from offering cigarette money, under the table money, and "facilitation fees" to keep

things moving to serve oneself.

Scotty expressed sympathy for them and said he could not go against the consensus of the customers and these twelve would have to be cut off for a year. They seemed to receive this better than expected but as they were leaving one policeman fired a shot into the air.

An hour later the policemen returned and threatened Ellu when Scotty was not there. They told Ellu that no other foreigners would be allowed to come to Bokondini and they threatened him and the students. The police ripped off all the school signs and yelled and screamed threats for half an hour.

Again, the students had nothing to do with the electricity but they are Papuans and the police are Indonesians. They carefully avoided Scotty during this tirade.

The next morning Scotty and the students put up new signs and posted a message saying "We are sorry but there will be no electricity until the police stop threatening and harassing us." Within thirty minutes the second in command of the police department arrived to Scotty's house asking if there is a way to solve this problem before it got out of control.

Again, he made apologies for his men and asked if the electricity could be turned on. The answer was "No" because threats and bribes don't work in this electrical system. Ninety people agreed to the rules, so twelve people have to follow and cooperate. Bribes, begging, apologies don't change the rules.

The police have guns and power and they have never had to follow rules in the highlands. The military and policemen walk into a home and demand dinner, a shower and women. They rule by force and power and serve themselves. All rules are manipulated for their benefit. They expect special treatment because they are "straighthairs" and rule over "kinkyhairs" with bullying and bribes.

Even with the apologies there are innuendos of "don't you realize how many people will get hurt if you don't give us what we want?"

Scotty believes that if he gives in, he will not be able to defend the kinkyhairs and the trouble will only return at another time. He does not believe these people will ever pay, so the situation will repeat itself. He believes if he gives in it will be a temporary peace at best.

Think About it

Answer Box # 13

1. What options do Scotty and Ellu have?
2. What would you do knowing the various options we have considered in this chapter?
3. What statements are being made by choosing various options?



learning

Summary & Conclusion

So, what have we learned in this unit? First, we've learned that conflict management begins by looking inside ourselves and there to identify the part we play in conflict situations. And then we examined five models or paradigms for conflict management which can serve as "strategies" in dealing with conflict. We also examined a biblical model of conflict management. We looked at a situation of conflict in West Papua, Indonesia and asked you to extrapolate from that case study how one might go about managing conflict. And finally you were asked to reflect upon a situation of conflict in your life/ministry with the purpose of applying the principles we examined in the unit.

What remains is for you to do your final assignment, which now follows.



Final Assignment

The purpose of the final assignment is to help you focus the three components of this unit, i.e. (1) the Bible study, (2) the conflict models (Elmer) and (3) the case study upon the situation of conflict you discussed above in answer boxes # 11, 12. You described the situation in box #11 and then wrote a brief essay how you would have developed it.

Your assignment now is to consolidate the work you did in those boxes into a more comprehensive response in the box below.

Guidelines:

1. Review what you wrote in boxes 1-12 making notes in the margin to the right.
2. Consider the pros and cons of each of the 5 models we've reviewed from your readings in Elmer and be prepared to present any relevant elements in what you write in the box below.
3. Reflect upon your cultural situation and ask which of the models seems more culturally relevant to your situation of conflict.
4. What do you learn from Scripture that helps you? Feel free to reference texts beyond those we considered in this unit.
5. With these elements as the primary content, answer the question: "What can I do with the information I have at this point how best to manage or resolve the conflict situation I'm facing now?"

Final Assignment

1. List the relevant pro and con elements of the 5 Elmer models of conflict. What is missing? What is helpful?
2. Which of the five models is more relevant to your cultural situation? Which is least relevant?
3. Cite relevant Scripture texts.
4. What can I do with the information I have at this point to best manage or resolve the conflict situation I'm facing now?"
5. What is missing? What do I not have to help me resolve the conflict situation I am facing now?

Reading



The following readings are taken from those previously mentioned textbooks:
We thank the Publishers for granting us permission to integrate the respective chapters of the books in the DAI workbook.

From: Osterhaus, James P, Joseph M. Jurkowski & Todd A. Hahn. *Thriving through Ministry Conflict: Understanding Your Red & Blue Zones*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan. 2005. Pp. 26-36. Used by permission.

Chapter 2: Ctrl + Alt + Delete = ?

Henry was laughing so hard that Barry had to hold the phone several inches away from his ear. "Henry!" Barry cut in, "this is so not funny! It's not! I cannot believe you suggested I meet with a so-called friend of yours whose sole purpose seemed to be to question my calling to ministry and my significance as a human being! What kind of friend is this guy?"

It was a few more moments before Barry could make out Henry's words through the laughter. "Barry, this is great, this is so great! He got you too!"

"He got me? He got me? What in the world are you talking about?" asked Barry, tight-lipped and annoyed.

"I guess I should have warned you," said Henry, finally calming down, "but then you would have missed the effect of Elliott's style. He does this to everybody who's facing big life questions. He asks a question or makes a charge that is designed to shatter your assumptions, cause you to look at things from an entirely different perspective, and make you think really hard. He calls this a 'reframe,' and it really works. You just got the Elliott treatment, my man!"

"He didn't make me think," said Barry. "He just attacked me and put me on the defensive."

"Are you so sure?" Henry replied. "I bet you had never considered the possibility that ministry might not be the right deal for you. Am I right?"

Barry was silent for a few seconds because he couldn't think of a rejoinder. "Yeah, I guess that is right. But what purpose does that serve, other than to cause me to reach for a bottle of Scotch, when I don't even like Scotch?"

"Again, it's all about thinking," said Henry, quite serious now. "He takes you down to your core, to the very questions that are most important about life and yourself, and makes you wrestle with them."

He doesn't let you wade in the shallow end. He wants you in the deep water at the other end of the pool."

Barry was listening now, and Henry continued, "Look, you have to go see him again, as hard as that may seem. I know the guy well enough to know that he wants you to. He wouldn't give the Elliott treatment to someone if he didn't think there was something to them. He only challenges those he knows can take it and grow from it."

"I'm not so sure you're right," said Barry. "The old guy seemed a little too gleefully malicious to me. But I'll call him, I'll call him."

"I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT OUR FIRST conversation really threw me off, Elliott," said Barry, sinking back again into the couch in the older

man's study. "I was angry at you and still am a little irritated and think you could have gone about things a different way. But Henry tells me that this is just something you do to help people like me."

"Some of my friends call it the Elliott treatment," said Elliott, smiling. "But I assure you that it is not a trick or a gimmick, and my question is in dead earnest. There is no more important question in life to ask than whether you are where you are meant to be, especially when it comes to one's vocation. So, Barry, have you thought through my question? Do you still believe that you are called to be a pastor?"

Barry was prepared for the question. "The short answer is yes, of course so. That's why I left a good-paying job and packed up my family for grad school and took this church. I still have a passion for serving God and others and want this to work. It's just that these struggles are so hard and frankly painful, and I'm not sure if I know what to do and how to do it." He paused for a moment, staring down at the rich carpet. "Can you help me?"

Elliott sat back in his chair and beamed, for the first time. "Barry, my friend, you have asked the right question! And you have done the right thing in admitting that you are powerless in your current situation. As my many friends in recovery would say, admitting you have a problem and can't fix it on your own is the first step to solving the problem."

Elliott stroked his right cheek with his fingertips and thought for a moment. "I want to be clear, though. I am not able to offer you any kind of quick fix. The fact is that the struggles you are facing with Jim Grendell and with others in the church have way more to do with you than with them. This is the first and in many ways the most important thing for you to grasp."

Barry started to protest, but Elliott continued, "And I know this is hard for you to hear and it may take a while for you to believe, and that's okay. Regardless of where the fault lies, these sorts of struggles in leadership are always rooted in the self, and in a combination of 'selves' rubbing up against one another. When I said I could not offer quick fixes, this is what I had in mind. Real change takes courage, time, and energy. In many ways it is like a battle."

Elliott stood up and began to pace the room. "Quick-fix change does not work, because at its best it is no more than technical change—surface change designed to tinker with the nuts and bolts of a situation without altering its real dynamics. Technical change has its place, but it is not the ultimate answer. On the other hand, adaptive change has its roots inside of the self and represents a new way of thinking, perceiving, and, only then, behaving. Adaptive change involves values and underlying structures. You cannot have real change without an honest, deep look at yourself. It is precisely this fact—that change presupposes seeing things that can be uncomfortable and even frightening—that keeps most people on the level of technical, surface change and rules out deep and satisfying change.

"By the way, this applies not only to work but also to personal relationships."

"That's a lot to take in," Barry noted. "I feel like I need some time to absorb it, and I will, but I guess I also want to get to the heart of this. Assuming that I do take the deep look at myself you recommend and figure out my thoughts and motivations and all of that, then what do I *do*? My situation is pretty acute."

"As is everyone's," said Elliott with a smile. "Everyone feels that way, and believe me, Barry, I do not want to downplay the urgency of your dilemma or the realness of your pain. I am simply asking you to trust me for now, to be willing to dive into deeper water in the hope that at the other end of that process you will be better equipped to handle not only the Jim Grendell situation but others as well. Better yet, that you will know how to avoid similar landmines in the future."

Elliott stopped pacing, sat down, and looked into Barry's eyes. "I have to ask you something now. Do you want this? Do you want to understand not only your situation but also yourself better? Are you willing to dive into the deeper water?"

"Yes," Barry replied, his voice suddenly small. "I'm not sure what I will find there, but I have tried everything else and I think this is my last chance."

"Excellent," beamed Elliott for the second time. "Let's get started."

"As we move through this process of learning," Elliott began, "you will need to be patient. I am going to introduce a number of concepts to you, but that number will not be a terribly high one. What is most important is that you have a deep understanding of each one. So you will need to devote time and careful attention to reviewing each concept that we discuss, and also from time to time complete 'homework' assignments I will give you. Are you prepared to do this?"

Barry nodded, so Elliott continued. "As a matter of fact, we have touched on two of the most important concepts today. The first is that in conflict, the vast majority of the time, the problem is more in us than it is in the person with whom we are in conflict. So resolution does not come from winning or changing the behavior of the other person, but it begins with having the courage to look inside and ask probing questions of yourself."

"The second concept is related to the first. It is that technical change—change on the surface—is not lasting change. Real, lasting change is called adaptive change, change that alters the very structure of the relationship or environment and touches on the deepest of issues such as values."

"Now, these two concepts, which I understand you may or may not fully accept, play themselves out in a number of ways in the work-place or, as in your case, board-staff-congregation relationships. I want to give you an example. I call it the difference between living in the Red Zone and in the Blue Zone."

"I know all about the Red Zone," said Barry jokingly. "My favorite football team is totally incapable of scoring inside their opponents' twenty yard line!"

Elliott allowed himself a small smile and moved on. "I am a foot-ball fan too, but that's not what I'm talking about. One day I was working with a group which was caught up in all kinds of conflict and misunderstanding, and I was struggling to put words to what I was thinking. They had a large whiteboard in the room, kind of like this one." Elliott paused to open a cherry cabinet, revealing a white-board inside. "And there were only two markers—a red one and a blue one. I like to work with what I've got, so I started experimenting with the colors. Blue is the team color of my beloved alma mater, and so I chose that color to illustrate the good zone, the Blue Zone. And red is the color of my alma mater's most bitter rival, and so I chose that color to represent the negative Red Zone."

He paused and smiled at Barry and actually laughed out loud. "See, I told you I am a sports fan!"

Elliott rummaged in a desk drawer and pulled out both a red and a blue marker. "So I drew a line from top to bottom on the white-board." He did the same on his own whiteboard. "And I titled the left half 'Blue Zone' and the right half 'Red Zone' and wrote on each side in its corresponding color."

Elliott picked up the blue marker. "Now, the Blue Zone in the workplace is what we call Professional Mode, or the Emotional Cool Zone. There are several things that characterize this zone."

He scribbled a phrase on the left side of the board:

Focus on efficiency and effectiveness

"This is the sign of a high-functioning workplace. People are focused on the goals of the team, doing the right things, and doing them the right way. There is a certain feeling when a workplace is humming, when the people there feel like winners because they are doing their work well and smoothly."

Elliott moved down several inches on the whiteboard and wrote with the blue marker:

Structures of the organization are closely monitored and respected

"What this means," said Elliott, "is that expectations, performance goals, reporting relationships, agreed-upon standards, and the like are actually taken seriously. Job descriptions are held to, and performance evaluations are based on mutually agreed-upon standards and are not arbitrary. People are held accountable, but not in an over-bearing way. Real accountability is related to trust; you cannot hold someone accountable if you do not trust them to live up to their end of the bargain to begin with. When standards shift and expectations change without negotiation, no one knows where they really stand, and this results in Red Zone reactions and behavior, which we will see in a minute."

Next, Elliott wrote:

Business issues are the first priority

"Now, Barry, this one is tough for people in the not-for-profit sector, particularly church leaders, a key part of whose business is caring for people. It is an easy and tempting thing to act as if caring for people includes not pointing out their failures to meet standards and performance expectations, and allowing their personal lives to disrupt their work performance and that of those around them. In fact, this has a devastating effect on both the employee and his or her colleagues."

Elliott cleared his throat and began to pace again. "Look, an organization that is focused on mission and has a clear set of core values and operating procedures is one that wins, one in which the employees have fun and are productive. But a workplace where one's personal agenda or problems detract from work, or where relational dramas and rivalries thicken the air, is an organization that underperforms and in which the workers are deeply unhappy.

"If the Blue Zone is where people are in professional mode and are emotionally cool, the Red Zone is where the atmosphere is characterized by a lack of professionalism and emotional heat, which can burn those who get too close.

"Are you starting to understand the Blue Zone a bit?" asked Elliott.

Barry squinted for a moment. "Yes, I think so. I understand the difference between technical and adaptive change, and I understand that an organization in which there is focus on results, consistent standards, and a constant commitment to the corporate mission is probably a really satisfying place to work. What I am not seeing clearly is how you can hold to these standards so tightly and still make the workplace, or a church board, a place where people are valued and cared for."

"That is a great observation, Barry," said Elliott. "Good job. Instead of answering that directly, I am going to go ahead and move through the Red Zone, okay?"

Barry nodded, so Elliott picked up the red marker and wrote on the right side of the board:

Focus more on feelings than results

"This is the opposite of a focus on efficiency and effectiveness," Elliott pointed out, waving his hand at the blue side of the whiteboard. "When we focus more on feelings and personal issues than on results, it creates uncertainty in the work environment. People are not sure where their personal and professional boundaries lie, and everyone is unsure about how to act. Inevitably this slows down the pace of a company and allows it to get derailed by issues that are not tied to the organizational mission."

"Like when Jim Grendell brings up how pastors get more time off than others," Barry said, "and when he brings up how personally 'disappointed' he is—"

"Perhaps," said Elliott. "But be careful, Barry. Remember that the focus in understanding these truths is on looking inside, not on pointing the finger at others. As a matter of fact, one of the classic traits of Red Zone behavior is blame-shifting, a lack of willingness to accept that one is part of the problem and not just a victim."

"Let me keep going, please, Barry. We are almost done. When we focus on feelings rather than results, we get caught up in conflict and we don't get our work done well, and so no one is happy. But when our corporate focus is on good work and on the common mission, the organization becomes a place of effectiveness and, dare I say it, fun!"

Before Barry could erupt at the thought of his job being fun, Elliott grabbed the red marker and wrote:

No common standards and no way of monitoring performance and behavior

"Again, this is the flip side of Blue Zone behavior. In the Red Zone, no one knows where they stand, what is expected of them, what is appropriate and inappropriate, and even whether they are doing a good job. That creates tons of uncertainty and anxiety. And when people get uncertain and anxious, they generally don't know how to handle that, and the easy thing is to lash out at others as the cause of one's anxiety. Get a group of people doing that and lapsing into cycles of anxiety, anger, blame, recrimination ... well, you get the picture."

"One more thing, and then we are done for today." Elliott wrote across the bottom right hand side of the whiteboard, again with red ink:

People expect the organization to be a family and they assume family roles

When he finished writing, the whiteboard looked like this:

Blue Zone

Focus on efficiency and effectiveness

Structures of the organization are closely monitored and respected

Business issues are the first priority organization

Red Zone

Focus more on feelings than results

No common standards and no way of monitoring performance and behavior

People expect the organization to be a family and they assume family roles

"Now, this is one for you to really dwell on, Barry," said Elliott. "A lot of folks expect and even want their church to be like a family."

And indeed, there are some familial aspects to a church; people are expected to take care of each other and be involved in each other's lives more than in a secular organization. But when it comes to the leadership function of a church, expecting family behavior is a recipe for disaster."

"Okay, I have tracked with everything so far," interrupted Barry, "but I have a hard time here. Churches are *not* businesses, as my seminary professors reminded me again and again. Sure, they are organizations, but they cannot have the hard-core, competitive, every person for themselves edge that corporations do. The church has to be different. I don't know if you read the Bible much, but Jesus said that the church is to be set apart, different from the world."

"I do not dispute your theology, Barry," said Elliott, a little sternly. "But I do want to challenge your assumptions. Now, who said that a business had to be hard core, competitive, cutthroat? There are many more Christian business people than there are pastors. Do you really think Jesus wanted all of them to be nice and gracious at church but then competitive, cutthroat monsters at work?"

Barry could not think of a thing to say.

"It's a rhetorical question, clearly," said Elliott, a little more softly. "My point is not that a church is to try to be like a business in every way. My point is that the church and a business have one crucial thing in common: they are both organizations composed of people.

"And another thing: neither one is a family. Hang on, Barry.

"Families are critically important, but they are different from work organizations. Families are designed to nurture, train, discipline, and orient their members to face the outside world with one constant—each other, relationships that are intended to survive no matter what. The same can't be said of organizations.

"In organizations, people often have to make choices—some-times choices to leave the organization—due to family responsibilities. A healthy person subordinates her work to the needs of her family and draws a clear boundary between the two. It is when the two get confused that conflict and misunderstanding and anxiety emerge. There are things that families can do that organizations, even churches, cannot. Workplaces and families both serve critical but very different purposes. A healthy organization is full of people who understand this and give their all to family (or other critical relationships, for those without family) and also give their all to the organization, but in very different ways."

Elliott paused and smiled. "I can see by the fact that you are massaging your temples that we have probably hit overload for the day, so let me sum up and give you an assignment, if I may.

"Bottom line, when an organization operates in the Blue Zone, the members operate on a healthy, professional level, with clear expectations and standards of behavior. But in the Red Zone, people allow their behavior to be driven by personal, emotional, and unprofessional motives. Often this shows up in petty conflict, jealousy, cut-throat behavior, and inconsistent performance. Working in the Blue Zone is fun, challenging, and rewarding. Working in the Red Zone is, well, you know, don't you Barry?"

Barry nodded. "This is so much to take in. I feel like a guy drinking from a fire hydrant."

"Right," replied Elliott. "And so I want to leave you with an assignment or two. When you get back to your home or office, open your journal or boot up your computer and write down the things we have talked about today. Then, every day for the next week, review what you have written. But don't just read it for content, Barry. The step I want you to take involves an inward look. Ask yourself questions such as these:

"Am I more of a Red Zone or a Blue Zone leader?"

"What are examples of Red Zone and Blue Zone behavior that I have demonstrated this week?"

"Do I tend to focus more on technical or adaptive change when I meet an obstacle?"

"And then write about these things too."

As Barry prepared to leave, he paused at Elliott's formidable front door. "Thanks. I will call again in a couple of weeks, and I will do the Elliott's eyes twinkled, just barely. "Oh, people are often surprised by how often I do laugh. I am honestly the most joyous man you are likely to know," he said as he shook Barry's hand and closed the front door.

As Barry reached the bottom of the stoop, the door swung open again and Barry turned around to see Elliott's face. "One more thing, Barry. I am glad you have seen me laugh, but I would not advise you to get too comfortable with me. You have barely begun to dip your big toe in the deep water. I will look forward to your call. Goodbye."

Barry had the drive home to wonder whether Elliott had been serious.



From: Elmer, Duane. *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. 1993 pp. 33-44. Used by permission.

Handling Conflict the American Way

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Several years ago I conducted a workshop for about sixty North American mission executives. The theme was continuing education for missionaries. Two questions formed the core of the three days we had committed to the topic: "What are the most significant needs of field missionaries?" and "What can we do to assist in meeting those needs?"

When we were ready to identify the number-one need of overseas-based missionaries, the opinion was unanimous. Without any question or debate everyone concluded: the greatest problem among missionaries is relational breakdowns among themselves, and our greatest need is to help them deal with conflict by building positive interpersonal skills.

I was disappointed but not surprised. My experience suggested the same, but I had hoped that it was not typical. What was true for missionaries seems to be true for North Americans in general. Increasingly the United States is becoming a nation of minorities where different frames of reference are producing alienation and violence. If the nation is to have a future that includes peace and prosperity, all of its peoples must not only coexist but learn to value, affirm and build upon each other's diversity. A healthy approach to understanding and managing conflict *is* a good beginning to cross-cultural relationships.

Conflict resolution has been explored by many researchers and writers in recent years, but most of their work has drawn from that of R. H. Thomas and K. W. Kilmann. Thomas and Kilmann identified five ways most Westerners handle conflict, and I will summarize

these strategies here.¹

The Win-Lose Strategy

Win-lose people assume that everything should be seen as right or wrong. They have a very small "gray" area and tend not to be very flexible or willing to negotiate. Everything must be judged as right or wrong, even obvious differences; thus it follows that everything that is "like me" will be judged as right and everything "unlike me" will be judged as wrong. Such people have little tolerance for ambiguity. Right and wrong must be determined as quickly as possible so one knows how to treat the matter or the person. If what was said or done is "wrong," corrective action is required. If it *is* "right," affirmation and encouragement are in order.

Perhaps the best illustration of a person who takes the win-lose position is the TV personality Archie Bunker of the 1970s series *All in the Family*. People all over the world have heard of Archie Bunker. Furthermore, everyone knows "Archie Bunkers" in their own network of relationships—the people who need to be right on every issue, who find it difficult to admit they were wrong, who find it hard to value differences, much less celebrate them, who try to get everyone to conform to their way of seeing things.

Win-lose people assume there *is* only one right position on most matters, so they competitively attempt to win others over to their position. The win-lose person employs a variety of tactics in trying to convert others from the error of their ways:

- 9 physical force—make the other person comply
- 9 threats—threaten loss of reward, loss of relationship or punishment
- 9 intimidation—try to frighten the other person into agreement
- 9 silence—refuse to speak until the other person gives in
- 9 verbiage and volume—outtalk or outshout the other person
- 9 point out past failures—say, "Because you were wrong in another situation, you are wrong now"
- 9 pull rank—"I am your boss [father, professor, supervisor]"
- 9 reward—promise something of value if they give in
- 9 spiritual one-upmanship—say, "While I was praying and reading the Bible, God gave me this conviction"; imply that God is on their side

The win-lose person is highly competitive and seeks to win whenever there is a difference of opinion. This is especially true if the person has personal or positional power. People who have a high need to win all debates or arguments are usually willing to sacrifice relationships in order to get their way. They tend to be quite assertive, especially if challenged, and will fight for everything as though all things were of equal value. They seem unable to distinguish between major and minor issues and usually do not know when to just "let it go."

Win-lose people usually fail to see themselves in this category. Others, however, see it quite clearly. If such a person is to be successfully confronted, usually several people need to approach him or her together. Going one-on-one with the win-lose person generally is not productive; the encounter becomes little more than an argument.

Someone has said, "Maturity is knowing more and more what is worth fighting for and what is not worth fighting for." The person

who has a need to win at every point needs to ponder this definition of maturity.

Of course, we must not go to the extreme of assuming that winning in a relationship is always bad. Sometimes we should strive for a win position. I tell my students, for example, that if someone suggests you engage in premarital sex, your virginity is worth fighting for; take a win position and be willing to sacrifice the relationship if it must come to that. That is one conflict you do not want to lose.

If someone says to me, "Would you like to have an open-minded discussion on the resurrection of Christ?" my answer is no. I am not open-minded on that point and will only take a win position if I get into a discussion about it.

There are certain goals, beliefs, values or ideals that you do not want to compromise or sacrifice, and it is wise to know in advance what those are. Let them be guided by Scripture. Be dogmatic and stubborn where God is, and be flexible where he is. The win-lose style of handling conflict has significant implications in cross-cultural situations. We shall return to it later.

Avoidance

The person who tries to manage conflict by avoiding it believes that differences are bad, they always cause hard feelings and broken relationships, and no good can come from confronting conflict.

Yet avoiding conflict or withdrawing from it does not allow these people to preserve important goals, values and ideals—nor does it allow them to preserve relationships. They lose on both counts and end up with weak or superficial relationships and little or no influence on important decisions.

Larry sensed that God was calling him to the mission field. Part of his training included an internship in a church. During the sixth month of his training, Larry mentioned to me that there seemed to be a little misunderstanding with his pastor. He was feeling uncomfortable but did not know what to do. He was not sure if the pastor sensed it as well and, if so, how he was feeling about it. I suggested that it was probably a small issue and a talk with the pastor would easily set everything right. Larry pondered my advice without making a commitment.

About a month later Larry brought the issue up again. This time he was clearly anxious and distraught. The problem had not really become bigger except in Larry's mind as he struggled with going to the pastor. I urged Larry to speak with the pastor; I even suggested words he might use to introduce the problem as he perceived it. I assured him the issue was not that serious and the pastor would surely understand. A happy resolution would come easily, but he must not continue delaying. Larry agreed but did not evidence much confidence or enthusiasm.

Shortly thereafter the pastor called me, wondering if I knew why Larry was acting rather unusual. The pastor had asked Larry if anything was wrong, but Larry had simply said everything was all right. Since I had some authority over Larry, I decided to brief the pastor on the situation in the hope of facilitating a speedy and positive resolution. We agreed to give Larry a few more days before the pastor gently took the initiative.

Larry had done a good job and earned everyone's respect, and we all saw him as a friend. We looked forward to getting the situation cleared up, since there were only two months left in Larry's internship.

Not long after my conversation with the pastor, my telephone rang. It was the pastor. In a confused voice he asked me if I knew where Larry was. He had found a note from Larry saying that he did not want to be a missionary any longer and therefore saw no reason to continue his internship. His room was cleaned out. No one in that church saw or heard from Larry again.

I had telephone numbers for his parents and his home church, so I called immediately. Yes, he had returned, they said, but he refused to talk to anyone about the situation other than to say that he had decided against being a missionary and wanted to get on with life.

Larry had responded to conflict with avoidance; when he was unable to share his feelings, he decided to withdraw physically and emotionally. Thus he gave up his goal of being a missionary and also lost the respect of the church members. Personal values as well as relationships were forfeited because Larry had only one way to handle conflict.

Tom, a missionary, had a similar problem. Everyone liked Tom because he was quiet and seemed willing to do things that others resisted—such as taking responsibility for the high-school young people during annual conference when all the missionaries and their families would gather to fellowship and conduct business. While the missionaries met, someone had to care for the children and teenagers. Most wanted to be in the meetings; so finding someone to care for the children for the bulk of the day was a bit of a problem—except for the high-schoolers, who had a ready volunteer in Tom. With his wife, Tom would plan delightful activities. His willingness to serve was much appreciated.

One day I told him how fortunate the missionaries were to have someone like him. He seemed embarrassed that someone would see him as valuable. Then I summarized a rather hotly debated controversy that had broken out during the missionary meetings that day. Since Tom had been out with the teenagers, I thought he would appreciate a summary. When I asked him what he thought, I heard a series of evasive remarks that suggested Tom was unwilling to take a position.

"I wasn't here to listen to the discussion, so I really couldn't say one way or another" was his first response. "It is a rather complicated matter, and both sides seem to have a good argument, so it all depends upon how you look at it," he said as I probed further.

"But how do you see it?" I asked, pushing the point.

"Well, I need to give it more thought; but right now I need to meet my family to get ready for the evening meal," he answered, walking away.

Tom's expertise at avoiding conflict was evident. While he was a good listener, he never took a position on anything of importance.

Both Larry and Tom took the avoidance or withdrawing approach to potential conflict situations. Consequently, neither had influence in terms of policies and directions, and their relationships tended to be quite shallow.

There are times when avoiding conflict or withdrawing from it is a good idea. Obviously, if the problem is trivial and not worth time and energy, it may be wise just to avoid it. I find this is important for parents to remember. They tend to treat every issue as life and death and try to steer the child in the "right" direction. When the issue is relatively unimportant, I tell them, let the child decide and begin to make the important discovery that each decision has consequences.

Strategic withdrawal can be a very wise choice. Perhaps emotions have been running high, and if you confront you may act unwisely or lose control. In such situations, avoid the conflict for a short period of time until you cool off and can reenter the situation creatively and with emotions under control.

You may also wish to avoid conflict if the potential consequences are too serious. For about a year I regularly ministered on the streets of Chicago in the evenings. If I saw a group of people coming toward me and there was the potential of hostility, I carefully

avoided conflict by crossing the street well ahead of their arrival. I did not know what a confrontation with one of these groups might bring, but clearly it made sense to avoid danger.

Avoiding conflict can be a sign of wisdom and maturity, but it can also signal an unwillingness to discuss important issues or a refusal to take a stand on a significant decision.

Giving In

Many people face conflict situations and simply give in, accommodate or smooth over the differences. Sometimes this response is called yielding. These people see most things as negotiable. Differences are rarely worth fighting about, so they find ways of accommodating to the other party. Maintaining relationships is most important, and someone must make the sacrifice of giving in or people would always be fighting. Nothing is accomplished by disagreement.

- 9 People who exercise the give-in approach to conflict resolution use phrases like
- 9 "I can see your point. Maybe there is something to it."
- 9 "Since you feel strongly, I am not going to disagree."
- 9 "It really doesn't matter that much. It will all come out in the wash."
- 9 "They didn't mean anything by it. Just ignore it."
- 9 "Sometimes you just have to take a few bumps and forget it."
- 9 "I think I can give in, just this once."
- 9 "Let it pass. It isn't worth making a fuss about."

While these people enjoy great relationships, they often forfeit personal goals and values. They can easily be taken advantage of, since they have difficulty saying no. Being people-pleasers, they are often doing things for others in the hope of averting any conflict or of softening some conflict.

Edith Bunker of *All in the Family* usually took this approach with her win-lose husband, Archie. Always eager to please, Edith would scurry around doing things for Archie and rarely raised a dissenting voice. She good-naturedly gave everyone the benefit of a doubt and assumed the best about others. When Archie and his son-in-law would get into heated debate, it was Edith who felt the pain and sometimes shouted, "Stop arguing!" The tactic usually brought silence but rarely peace.

In fairness to Edith, there were a few times when she refused to back down and with impassioned feeling blurted out, "No, Archie, you're wrong!" The person who generally gives in can be pushed too far and will then strike back with a nonnegotiable win position.

When is it wise to give in? If the issue is of little consequence, it can make sense to let others have their way, especially if maintaining the relationship is of greater importance than winning the conflict. Save your time and energy for more important issues. Then, if you are wrong, it is wise to say, "I am sorry. I was wrong. You were right." Many people find this difficult to do, but it is very important for preserving the relationship. Also, there is nothing wrong with giving in this time so that next time your preference might be honored. This is a worthwhile approach when minor differences occur. For example: "Tonight I will go with you to the concert if next weekend you will go with me to the museum."

You may occasionally want to let others have their own way so that they might learn their mistake through suffering the consequences. Obviously you wouldn't want to give in if the potential consequences were too serious. But let's assume the

consequences are not too serious. For example, my college-age son wanted to buy a fourteen-year-old, 124,000-mile junker of a car. He had an affection for it which fell somewhere between pity and respect for the aged. I confess, it did seem to run well. Sensing his attachment to the rickety thing, I did not let him know that I would not have bought it, because I did not want to contradict his feelings. We discussed the pros and cons, but the decision was his. Even if he bought it and his decision turned out to be a mistake, the consequences would not be severe. The loss of a relatively small amount of money would be totally insignificant in the larger context of his whole life. For me, avoiding potential conflict or hurt feelings seemed the wisest response. And my son eventually decided against buying the car.

Compromise

The compromising person believes that it is impossible to have every-thing, so everyone should give a little and get a little. Sometimes you may get a little less, other times a little more, but it will all even out over time. Life is the art of negotiating to some happy middle ground.

Compromise *is* common in labor-management negotiations. Each party comes with demands that appear outrageous to the other party. No one gets upset, though, because everyone knows that many of these will fall by the wayside before the final settlement is reached. It is assumed that taking an extreme position at first is the best way to bargain, that eventually the parties will settle on a happy medium, with neither side getting everything it had originally asked for, and that everyone will be basically satisfied. "Life is a series of tradeoffs," reasons the person who uses compromise as a way of managing conflict.

On the surface this seems a very desirable way to handle conflict situations. Everybody comes away happy (at least in theory). Actually, though, this method means that one or both parties must give up *something*, and it may be something important. Then one party will walk away dissatisfied and unhappy. Members of that group may subsequently look for ways to "even the score" and thus sabotage the agreement. Or next time they may take a win-lose position. So there are two major problems with compromise: it endangers the relationship, and each side must be vigilant in order not to compromise something important.

Another problem with compromise is that it works poorly when either party has disproportionate power. If one party has greater power, she or he can negotiate tougher, from a position of superior strength, knowing that the other party cannot bargain as an equal. Again, one side is likely to walk away unhappy.

Like the other styles of handling conflict, compromise is neither bad nor good in itself. Its value depends on how it is applied and in what situations. We don't want to compromise on important goals or values, but if certain goals or hopes are only moderately important to us, it may make sense to give them up in order to achieve something else.

Compromise may be necessary or desirable in an emergency or when time is a critical factor. If a crisis is looming and a decision is hard to reach, compromise may be the most desirable option. If a compromise cannot be reached, all may be lost. As in other situations, before making the decision we must weigh the values and goals that would need to be compromised. What values and goals do you refuse to compromise under any circumstances? What might you compromise under certain circumstances? It is helpful to think about this in advance.

Carefronting

"Carefronting" means directly approaching the other person in a caring way so that achieving a win-win solution is most likely. With this approach neither party loses anything important and the relationship does not suffer. However, several conditions must be met to achieve a mutual win situation through carefronting.

1. The two parties can come together, meet face to face and talk with open honesty.
2. They each make a commitment to preserve the relationship and dispassionately explain the values/goals that each wishes to protect or achieve.
3. They can creatively find a solution in which they can both be equal winners, with neither giving up anything of value, and thus preserve the relationship.
4. They can do this with reason, keeping emotions under control.
5. They are both able to separate the person from the issue and speak objectively to that end.
6. Neither will be satisfied with a solution until the other is also completely at peace with it.

Striving for the win-win solution has been the focus of many management and interpersonal relationship books in recent years, and rightly so. It is a major step in breaking the competitive nature of problem-solving and replacing it with cooperative attitudes and skills.²

Some authors argue that carefronting is not simply one way of handling conflict but the only right way. They cite Matthew 18:15-17:³

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

The text seems clear that direct, face-to-face confrontation in a caring, loving way is the biblical approach to conflict. What is not so clear is whether this is intended to be the *only* approach to conflict or whether it represents one good approach. We must also ask whether this approach is, at least to some extent, more acceptable in some cultures than in others. Cultural variables may dictate how to approach conflict and help us see some Scriptures in a new light. How culture affects our style of conflict resolution is the theme of the following chapters.

Summary

It's important to know each of the five styles of conflict resolution—and to notice which particular style(s) one is prone to use. Knowing that we have a choice helps us choose the best option for a given situation. If we are locked into one or two options, we run the risk of aggravating the conflict and putting stress on the relationship. Being aware of the range of choices, we can choose an approach that will help us preserve goodwill without sacrificing other things that we value.

In this chapter we have been looking at *Western* ways of resolving conflict. Do other cultures use different styles of conflict management? If so, why? What cultural values support other ways of handling conflict? Do these styles find biblical support?

Conflict Management & Resolution

Unit 5

How do Christian Leaders Manage Socio-Political Conflict?



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Unit 5

How do Christian Leaders deal with Socio-Political Conflict?

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Readings:

Bible Texts: Jonah 4, Romans 11, Mathew 5

Extended Case Studies, included in the text of the workbook: Le Chambon, Mohandas Gandhi, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Learning Objectives:

- Establish Biblical foundations for being politically involved in socio-political issues.
- Learn from 3 case studies how Christian leaders handled socio-political issues
- Examine 3 models of encounter with violence and political orientation.
- Encourage student to reflect upon a socio-political issue with the aim to become involved in a productive way.
- Integrate models in former units into a broader approach to managing socio-political issues.

Introduction

Much that's been covered so far in our study is related to interpersonal conflict in families, in the work place and in ministry situations. We turn now to the larger picture of geo-political conflict. Admittedly the subject is huge and far too broad to cover in any exhaustive way in this small unit of study. Issues of tremendous complexity face the global community! Islamic extremisms, tribalism, drug wars, fragmenting traditional culture values and many others are among the issues of conflict that plague our planet.

We use the term *socio* or *geo-political* in reference to conflicts of a sociological, political and economic nature that effect the way people live in such a way as to create widespread conditions of uncertainty, revolution and violence.

How are Christian leaders to think about these concerns? What actions if any should we take? Should we become involved? If so how and by what rationale, either Biblically or sociologically, are we justified? And what models of involvement should be employed? Is violence desirable or even permitted? Is passive non violence the approach we should take? There are those who believe so. Or should we follow the example of men like Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King and promote proactive non-violent resistance? Or should Christians resort to active violence as did Dietrich Bonhoeffer?

We can't answer all these questions. The space allotted here is too limited and the issues too complex to deal with responsibly in an exhaustive way. What we can do is present a sample of intentional responses to geo-political conflict with the purpose of providing relevant examples out of which the student may form his or her own approach to the unique situation you are facing. We will also refer to former models already covered (Unit 4) with the expectation that the student will apply models from that data relevant to the student's situation.

You might be thinking that you have more than enough problems facing you already and to become involved in a broader global context is more than you want to take on. We concur with your concern. And so we will not paint a picture of international conflict and how nations must deal with that. A lot has been written about that and is readily accessible through libraries, the media and the internet. The parameters of our focus are more narrowly drawn to include those issues you as a Christian leader will likely face in your work or ministry.

Contemporary local issues are readily available and the student is encouraged to look closer to home. We, the instructors, will present models that we think hold universal principles of application that you can apply to local conflict issues of a geo-political nature. These can include the *Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda (LRA)*, socio-political instability in *Darfur of the Sudan*, *AIDS* epidemics throughout Africa and parts of Asia, *tribalism* that continues to create conditions of genocide among the Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda and other cultures.

Issues facing India include the ongoing *friction* between India and *Pakistan over Kashmir*, raging conflict between the *Tamil Tigers*, Sri Lanka and the implications for India, *Muslim/Hindu clashes* of culture and worldview. Conflict abounds everywhere.

As you can see the list is endless. So, to sharpen our focus and narrow our scope of study we ask you to select a socio-political issue you'd like to research for this unit. In the box below please describe some issue that you'd like to research and to which you can apply some of the principles we'll discuss in this unit.

Think about it?**Answer Box # 1**

Describe a socio-political issue that you want to research in this unit. Provide some details about the issue that will help guide you and your instructor in knowing more precisely what you want to do. You can come back to this box as you proceed through the unit and fill in more detail as you go.

Are you feeling that the issue you have described above is bigger than you are? I suspect you feel overwhelmed by the magnitude and the seriousness of the situation you have just described. And I suspect you are asking the question, “What can I do alone?” Well, you aren’t alone. God loves you and partners with you. He too is concerned about the issue you have described. Indeed I suspect He placed it in your heart and mind.

Establishing a Biblical Perspective On Managing Socio-Political Conflict

Do you remember the conversation between Jonah and God? Let’s take a moment to reflect upon that situation because there are some lessons to learn from it..

Go to the book of Jonah and read the entire book. Read carefully and take notes in the margin of this paper on the broader issues of conflict that are there. I suspect you have read this book before and likely you’ve heard many sermons about it that have focused for the most part on Jonah’s lack of obedience to God or perhaps taking the story as an example of reticent missionary work. Which of course is all legitimate. This time however read the book looking for socio-political conflict.

When you have finished reading it, maybe 3 times, return to your notebook and we’ll continue.

Finished? Good! Did you learn anything new? I hope your notes in the margin to the right of this text will help you as you reflect further on our topic.

Now go to the passage below and read Jonah 4: 5-11 again. We will interact with this passage in the box that follows.

Now, go to the box below and interact with the questions there.

Answer Box # 2

1. Why was Jonah angry?
2. What answer did God give in response to Jonah's reply why he was angry?
3. What was God concerned about?
4. Is there something in your life, or your culture, about which God is concerned and about which you also should be concerned? Does it bring you into conflict with others, with your Christian principles and faith? What does God want to teach you?

God Cares for People in Socio-Political Conflict

Do you see that God's concern was the welfare of the people of Nineveh? And do you see that the issue with Jonah was his pride? Jonah, for whatever reasons, hated the people of Nineveh and was willing and happy to pronounce God's judgment upon them. Underneath it all, he knew God was compassionate and would show mercy to the inhabitants of the city if they repented; which is precisely what happened.

The point we need to get here is that God cared for the people of Nineveh while Jonah did not. Could it be that God was as concerned about the uncompassionate attitude of Jonah as much as He was concerned about the wickedness of the inhabitants of the city? I wonder sometimes about our attitudes toward people and evil. Does our hatred for the evil in the world spill over into attitudes of hatred toward sinners? What attitude do you think God wants you to have toward evil and wrongdoing?

We'll examine the lives of three people who were faced with situations that demanded moral Christian choices in the midst of extreme social and political conflict. We've selected these on the basis of the nature of conflicts they faced and what we can learn from them and to help us face our situations of conflict.

The first of our situations is found in the small village of Le Chambon in Southern France during the years of conflict of World War II. We'll introduce in each of these cases a particular approach to conflict that is demonstrated in that case study. Please understand that we are not recommending that you select one model over the other as the ideal approach you should take in your situation. We are simply placing these before you for your reflection. We take no "cookie cutter" approach to managing conflict internationally any more than we do for personal or interpersonal conflict situations. All situations are different and therefore require individual responsible reflection and consistent prayer, seeking to understand the heart and mind of God.

Le Chambon: A Community of People who faced Difficult Moral Choices

Introduction

It seems appropriate to begin with a unique approach to conflict. It comes from a deeply religious conviction and commitment to ***active non-violent resistance***.

This approach comes from the terrible years of World War II (1939 – 1945). We are greatly helped by the research of Phillip Hallie, a Jewish professor. He wanted to know if anyone had helped the Jews during World War II and his research led him to a village of Huguenots in France where goodness happened. His report is mystifying and yet alluring. It will change your life, and maybe your death.

At first sight it appears that people who are committed to non-violence in the world are the ones who find themselves in the midst of violence, and often die by that violence as do the violent ones. They do, however, make differing statements. For some there is great value in fighting to the end. For others, a stronger statement would be to resist evil and be killed by evil men rather than to cooperate with wrong-doing. It is for you to decide what your statement will be in life as well as in death. We will see this clearly in this case as well as the one that follows, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Background

The people of Le Chambon decided to follow the leadership of their pastor and a school teacher in the community, by defying the Vichy government and the occupying German Nazi military by hiding Jewish adults and children who were fleeing countries in Europe where Jews were being rounded up and deported to death camps. The Christian community Le Chambon did this because of their

strong belief that all human life was *precious*, to use their words. It worked because of the solidarity, leadership and history of a people who were willing to take risks, even to die for the value they believed God gave them for human life.

Phillip Hallie says in his book, *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*, that we are pushed to the point of losing faith in ourselves and in God, and “our redemption lies in remembering.” You will be deeply challenged by his account given briefly in this unit. His was a time of political insanity. You too may feel that is where you are living today with inhumanity in government and a craziness where there seem to be “no answers.”

Le Chambon: The Community

The history of the people of Le Chambon began in the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre (1572) which took away their religious rights, and forced them to labor in the king’s galleys and endure social ostracism. Their beginnings gave to them a mindset for a simple uncomplicated life, always expecting the worse from the government and those who served the military. From 1686 until 1940 their lifestyle changed very little. Perhaps this is another reason they valued life so dearly in the face of the advance of Hitler’s armies.

Hallie quotes France’s leader in saying “only fools and people of principle resisted openly.” (Hallie 1979:86) French novelist, playwright, existentialist philosopher, and literary critic. Jean Paul Sartre said of this period:

We lost all our rights and first of all that of speaking; We were insulted face to face each day, and it was Necessary to be still; we were deported en masse, as workers, as Jews as political prisoners (ibid:87).

The plan was to generate national solidarity through racial hatred. All who were Jews, communists and Freemasons were persecuted. The Jews were singled out for the worst treatment. After a huge massacre of 28,000 Jews killed, of which 4,000 were children, the leaders of the village of Le Chambon wept.

Pastor Andre Trochme, a living caricature of the spirit of the Chambonaise, carried a message on his pastoral visits across the fertile fields to the homes of his people. He was aggressive, strong and determined as he modeled a message that said

only an intimate relationship between a faithful person and God, only a person’s conscious obedience to the demands of God, could arouse and direct the powers that could make the world a better place than it is. (Ibid:63)

Trochme’s political and social commitments evolved from an elite educational system filtered through his Huguenot moral conscience but found his conscience could not embrace all that he learned. It all became a good test of what he genuinely committed himself to as a follower of God when he became a conscientious objector.

In his own mind non-violence was completely expressed in words as simple and direct, as his friend and co-worker stated, “One must refuse to shoot. Christ taught us to love our enemies. That is His good news that we should help, not hurt each other, and anything you add to this comes from the Devil. (Ibid:61)

Let’s pause a moment before going further with our case study and reflect a bit on what we’ve read so far about Le Chambon. We’re not asking you to rush to judgment but rather to do some preliminary thinking about active non-violent resistance. Our pedagogy asks you to consider what you are reading, what you are thinking, and to gather your thoughts before going on.

So, go to the next box and interact with the questions there and when you have finished continue with the study of Le Chambon and its courageous people.

Think about it!**Answer Box # 3**

1. Describe in your own words the choice that Pastor Trochme and his congregation faced.
2. What do you think about the active non-violent approach Pastor Trochme is taking in this case?
3. Have you considered using this approach?
4. In what situation would you use this approach?

When Trochme proposed to his wife Magda who grew up in a wealthy home, he said,
Magda, I shall be a Protestant pastor, and I want to live a life of poverty. I am a conscientious objector, and that could mean prison as well as all sorts of difficulties (ibid:66)

Magda had no idea how prophetic this marriage proposal would be in their lives. With no regrets they turned down scholarships and opportunities and Trochme took his new wife away from the comforts and luxuries she had known to pastor the community at Le Chambon.

We pointed out that open confrontation and resistance was a costly and risky option for the people of France during those awful days. Hitler was too powerful. Pastor Trochme began his resistance movement openly when the youth who were required to give outward signs of obedience to the occupation forces. Trochme thought they were trying to create some “*vague fantastical national soul which was more precious than human lives.*” This he must resist.

Pastor Trochme began by encouraging his students to speak up when government officials came to visit. Romans 13 was a passage they relied upon to help them through these trying times. In other contexts the same passage was used but for the opposite

purpose of requiring compliance with government edicts. The people of Le Chambon however, under the teaching of their pastor, believed the teaching of Romans 13, and these people knew it well, that the ethic of neighborly love demanded not a bitter confrontation with the government but a perfunctory, minimal respect for the “governing authorities” with a firm but quiet hint that there are limits set by the commandment not to do wrong to a neighbor (ibid:101).

Their conclusion was that the love of neighbor is a higher law, and respect for government is a lesser commitment, not to be ignored, but to be kept in an appropriate place in view of the terrible fact that evil men were governing them. God’s intention, they believed, is the law of love.

Pastor Trochme’s non-violence was an attitude based on an ethical decision that all human life is precious. This belief was that the biblical injunction not to kill was binding upon all human beings. A man could not support a government that disobeyed this command of God.

He translated these beliefs into unique and creative ways of avoiding open confrontation and violence. Trochme’s sermons did not contain methodologies or strategies to accomplish this purpose. They were messages designed to inspire and to motivate the people, leaving room for individual application. A network of confidential communication was ingeniously devised to assist this application and it was kept functioning throughout the community.

No incriminating evidence was allowed to pass between people that would lead to compromising exposure of those involved in the clandestine hiding of Jews in homes or of escorting them safely over the mountains to neighboring neutral Switzerland. The messages were later decision making.

This is precisely the purpose of the leadership courses you are taking now. As you develop strong mature Christian character you will be able to apply and live out in your own cultures what you are becoming without relying primarily on strategies or methods. We hasten to add that strategies and methods are important as soon shall become evident in the case of Le Chambon. But they must be applied by people of strong Christian character and resolve first.

You will have the same creativity, and ability to adapt to your situation as this man and his congregation did in Le Chambon.

Pastor Trochme made statements in his messages that indicated what the role of a Christian should be. He said, “An imitator of Christ must *somehow* make such moves *as are appropriate* when the occasion arises”. He taught them to have an attitude of resistance and they developed an canny unsentimental watchfulness for opportunities to do something in the spirit of that resistance (Ibid: 85).

He preached, and the people believed, that if they chose to resist evil firmly that then ways and means of doing it would open up to them. Trochme himself acted upon this principle and his creativity impressed, inspired and in turn generated creativity in others. In so doing he modeled an intimate style of leadership that differed markedly from the violent activist groups committed to death and destruction in their resistance to the Vichy (French Provisional Government under Hitler).

Trochme believed in “timing” as a key factor in making choices and decisions to resist. His emphasis was always “now” – not later. There is a time when non-violent resistance is too late. One must be prepared when the time presents itself. Non-violence demands preparation, organization, teaching, patience, plans, and an infrastructure. Jesus’ establishment of it didn’t wait . . .

Much remains to be said about Pastor Trochme and his courageous parishioners but enough is before us to move on. Let's take a few moments now and pause to reflect upon what the case might teach us. Please go to the next box and interact with the questions there. And then we'll consider some guidelines or principles that might be learned from the people at Le Chambon.

Think about it !

Answer Box # 4

What would it take to hold a community together in a non-violent response to evil?

What type of person could lead a people to this sort of strong statement and resistance?

Lessons Learned from Le Chambon

It's been said that those who don't learn the lessons of history are destined to repeat its mistakes. With that in mind what can we learn from the courageous people in Le Chambon? Are there principles that apply in other contexts? Let's look at some guidelines we can glean from Le Chambon that will help us in our attempts to live as responsible Christian leaders. .

1) Strong leadership is required.

Without strong leadership it would have been impossible for the community of Le Chambon to have been involved in active non-violent resistance. Intelligent leadership with strong ethical reflection leads to positive and innovative action. These leaders shared their strong and deep convictions of the biblical principles of *goodness*, *righteousness*, and *non-violence* and many other such values.

2) The laity is important.

The leaders were dependent upon the faithful cooperation, conviction, and creativity of the laity. There was mutual support but the laity was teachable, faithful and thoroughly Christian in their understanding of and their approach to the Jewish problem. They were willing to sacrifice.

3) Hard ethical decision and difficult moral choices are required.

They evaluated the civil laws on the basis of their Christian beliefs. When there was conflict between the laws of the land and their Christian conscience they chose to follow their conscience which was guided by Scripture as they understood it and for the stability of their communities.

4) Ethical reflection involves the community

Ethics are not developed in a vacuum nor are they private principles isolated from human experience. Had these individuals not acted collectively upon their mutually held ethical convictions the results would have been much the same as in those communities in Hitler's Germany that sent Jews to their deaths in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Together they influenced all of France and beyond.

5) Human Life is highly valued.

They were willing to allow their lives to be disturbed in order to preserve the precious lives of others. "*The tragic thing about the war was not the death of men, but that it destroyed the tragedy of death itself*" (ibid: 274)

6) The Chambonnaise sought to diminish evil and so must we.

They did not seek merely to avoid evil, but they acted on positive ethics rather than negative ethics to subjugate evil to good. It was not enough for them to avoid doing evil deeds themselves. It has been said that for evil to win over good is for good men to do nothing.

7) They were willing to sacrifice and serve others and so must we.

They did not avoid personal sacrifice and realized that this could be a life-sacrifice.

8) They actively resisted attempts to pervert their Faith and so must we.

They avoided the twisted controls of the governments to offer "religious Liberty" in exchange for their conscience. They acted against these efforts to "buy" their souls.

9) The Chambonnaise followed biblical models and so should we.

They lived under the instruction of the bible for the community to have fellowship, service, non-violence, enduring hope, and proclamation and communication.

10) The Chambonnaise devised simple solutions and so should we.

They were committed to preserve human life. That simple commitment guided them into creative solutions that were simple, direct and without complicated strategies or grandiose plans that could have backfired and could have put the community into more danger than they were already.

11) Their commitment brought danger to their doorstep and will it to ours.

Think About it!

Answer Box # 5

In light of these principles what practical lessons can you derive for Christians living in the situation of conflict you described in box # 1

What are the options do you see that are relevant to the situation you are facing?

What difficulties do you see in this approach to violent conflict?

At what point should one begin practicing openly an active non-violent approach to resistance?

One More Look at Le Chambon

We move from the guidelines above to three basic principles we glean from Le Chambon. I'm borrowing some of these principles from a friend and mentor, Dr. Arthur Glasser. He wrote an insightful article which I refer to below. (*Missiology*. (Vol VIII, No 3, July 1980.)

Arthur Glasser is one who knows about conflict. He was a missionary to China in the pre-communist years (1949). He told his students about the day he was hauled before the communist cadres and asked why the elder in the church he pastored was allowed to grow opium. Did he not know that opium was bad for the people and for the society? Why would the church permit such evil practices? Dr. Glasser admitted to us that day in class that he had no ready answer to give. He was deported from China and the elder was summarily executed.

From that day Dr. Glasser understood in a way that had escaped him before that the Church must be responsible to its culture in living out Biblical faith. So when I requested that he serve as my mentor in dealing with Marxism in a transitioning Buddhist/Marxist environment he agreed wholeheartedly.

He brought with him an emphasis on serious theological reflection to situations of conflict on the part of the believer. He also looked at post World War II for situations in which Christians sought to live out a form of Biblical Christianity. He learned some important principles that will guide us in our study here.

1. Christians can easily be deceived.

We return to World War II where it is noted, “with little exception the great majority of German and French Christians did not oppose Hitler in his mass murder of the Jewish people as well as other ethnic groups that protected them. They supported Hitler even though they were well acquainted with his virulent anti-Semitism even before he came to power.”

Glasser comments further that,

Ours is a day when many self-appointed messiahs from the Political left, right, and center are seeking to win Christian Churches to their causes. They promise liberation from oppression and national renewal. They pledge to advocate human rights, economic independence and material prosperity. ‘We are to cling tightly to Christ and hold other loyalties rather loosely – especially loyalty to nation, to race and to cultural roots. Caesar is never the friend of Christ’ (1980:262)

We will meet Dietrich Bonhoeffer later in this study but it should be noted here that he was one among a very few of that period in Germany who refused to sign the *Aryan Clause*, the document that disenfranchised Jews from German citizenship and prevented them from practicing their professions. Born out of their refusal to sign that document was a group who became known as the *Confessing Church*, believers who refused to deny Jews their humanity. Do you see that in their theological understandings of human beings as created in the image of God that there is a corresponding sense of their citizenship in a nation? There was a tacit understanding that it is not possible to deny a human being his human citizenship without doing serious damage to one’s theology.

Theirs was a costly decision. The Lutheran pastors of Germany, being members of a State Church, received their salaries from the government. Their decision not to sign the clause cost them their jobs and their salaries, among other dangers they faced daily. It is not a surprise that one of Bonhoeffer’s publications is the *Cost of Discipleship*. The majority of German Christians went along with Hitler’s edict, citing Martin Luther’s anti Semitic statements, often out of context.

2. The Integrity of the church is always a Central Issue.

The central issue of Le Chambon was the objection to perversion of the Christian faith. Glasser again points out that “*the church would betray Jesus Christ if it sought to identify religious aims with national aims.*” (1980:263)

There is an interesting irony in the church conceptually. You will recall Jesus’ words, “....*I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Matthew 16:18)*. It seems significant that nothing more is said by Jesus about its sociological structure, its hierarchy of leadership; nothing at all about its outward form. It seems Jesus was content to get it going and then leave its development to His followers. That being the case can we not infer that Jesus allowed for a lot of diversity in its development? Of course the teaching of the apostle Paul 50 to 65 years after the fact of the establishment of the Church by Jesus provides guidelines about its nature and character. But its development in the interim between Jesus’ establishment of it didn’t wait for the Apostle to come on the scene.

Our point here is that there seems to be a great deal of diversity allowed to a group of believers to develop their church structure but its nature and character is formed by that first catechism of the church, *Jesus is Lord.*” Hence the Lordship of Christ was central to the formation of individual groups or church bodies.

3. Christians Cannot be Neutral about Moral Issues.

Christians must determine what is right and what is wrong about the choices they are facing. And they must act upon that knowledge! The church must act and not be silent if it is to remain the church. We cannot remain silent on issues of life and death. The church must speak and act as its true self.

The words of Jesus again come to our aid for clarification about what we should do. You'll recall His words in *The Sermon on the Mount*. The Sermon is introduced by a series of "blessed" statements, which mean essentially "happy" or "fulfilled" are those whose attitudes are as stated in that passage. John Stott, in his commentary on the Sermon, says that the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) represent the moral core of Christianity.

There is much to learn from the Sermon but let's focus on the summary statement at the end of the "blessed" statements (5:1-9). Martin Lloyd Jones says that the "blessed" statements are descriptions of Christian character. And that Christian character then leads to being "salt" and "light" as seen in vs. 13, 14. It is these two verses that describe the role of believers with regard to their cultures.

13 You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

14 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

Not original is the idea that the salt metaphor in this text alludes to two things: being an inhibitor to moral decay and corruption and to provide interest and excitement to life. Being a light to the world is to bring understanding and conscience about one's actions.

This being the case Christian leaders must not ignore or evade their responsibility, even their obligation, to make moral decisions and take moral actions.

John Stott describes the central message of the Sermon in these words:

Jesus emphasized that his true followers, the citizens of God's kingdom, were to be entirely different from others. They were not to take their cue from the people around them, but so prove to be genuine children of their heavenly Father. To me the key text of the Sermon on the Mount is 6:8, 'Do not be like them' (John Stott, Christian Counter Culture. Intervarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL. 1978:18)

Think about it!

Answer Box #6

1. What attacks on your Christian faith, if any, have you experienced? Describe.
2. Is there a movement, a statement, a purpose of your government that is not consistent with your Christian Conscience? If so describe it.
3. Can you remain neutral on that issue? Please explain.

Case Study: Mohandas K. Gandhi, a man of integrity

Not all leaders are elected or even appointed. Not all have titles or lead by position. Gandhi was no emperor, not a military general, not a president, nor a pastor, nor a prime minister. If anything, Mohandas K. Gandhi was a constant experimenter and natural born leader among the peoples of India during a critical historical period of transition from British Colonialism to national independence.

He came to leadership holding values and with established goals, some of which were realized and others were not. Throughout his life he experimented with new and innovative ways to move toward his goals. He was a seeker, a student and as he learned he shared with others.

His thoughts became words of action among many of the masses of India. He was a man who did what he said and he led an exemplary and a transparent life.

Gandhi was able to lead because of his high moral and ethical values and his great compassion. He was unwilling to accept the status quo, but instead reached for higher goals. Men and women of his temperament often do not want position. I hope this is an encouragement to you in that it is not always necessary to have position to lead and influence others. He was one of the world's great leaders without that. He avoided positions of power. An idealist, and a deep thinker he was a great leader of men and ideas (*Gandhi: An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Mohandas K. Gandhi, 1927, 1929*. Beacon House Press. Boston, MA. 1957: 250-252).

He was able to give leadership to the masses of India because he identified himself with the struggles and pains of the common Indians. He became the sole voice of the downtrodden and the exploited. The common Indian believed that Gandhi understood their difficulties and would do what he could to provide justice for them. Not only did he influence India but he also influenced the larger world as well; kings, untouchables, rich, poor, foreigners, and women. Gandhi was a peacemaker in a troubled world.

Our interest in Gandhi here is the leadership he provided India's five hundred million people in their transition from two and one-half centuries under the colonial rule of the British Empire. He did this without firing a gun, without an army or taking a hostage, and without holding significant political office.

Gandhi's passion for integrity was bolstered by his conviction that integrity was also a practical matter. To speak of truth and sanitation in the same sentence was a hallmark of Gandhi's work and his life. He held a strong belief that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality.

Lawyers in general are not known for their high moral standards but Gandhi's example as a lawyer was characterized by a moral theme of compassion which set him apart. I quote,

My joy was boundless. I had learnt the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realized the true function of a lawyer is to unite parties riven asunder. . . . I lost nothing thereby (in future cases), not even money, certainly not my soul. (Ibid: 134)

Africa was for Gandhi a laboratory for India. It was in Africa that he discovered principles and methods that would later find their fullest expression when he returned to India, thus providing an excellent argument by example for cross-cultural learning. We can and should learn from other cultural contexts and observe in those cultures things that bring new insight to our own experience (ibid: 127).

Gandhi encountered racial, religious, political, and socio-economic injustices to himself. At one time while traveling in Africa as an Indian National, he purchased a first class ticket. He planned to enjoy the trip but was told by the conductor to take his seat in third class accommodations. Gandhi refused to leave his first class seat for which he had paid and was consequently thrown off the train at the next stop.

This experience did not create anger, but rather a thoughtful response which drew him closer to action. He would not consider taking revenge; he would not seek redress for wrongs, only to the extent that would be necessary to bring justice for others. Though Gandhi himself was often victimized he refused to assume an attitude of victimization. Instead he assumed an attitude of, "I am sure that when the truth becomes known, they will be sorry for their conduct." He countered evil deeds with compassion. He believed that one should overcome evil with good.

Gandhi's increasing well-articulated strategy of non-cooperation with unfair and oppressive laws repeatedly called him to the attention of the authorities. As a result he often spent time in jail

Gandhi taught a strategy of preparation for civil disobedience when it overlaps with values. He said:

Before one can be fit for the practice of civil disobedience one must have rendered willing and respectful obedience to the state laws. Compliance out of fear of the consequences of disobedience is not what is required. (What is required is) to obey the laws of society intelligently and of his own free will, because he considers it his duty to do so. It is only when a person has thus obeyed the laws of society scrupulously that he is in a position to judge as to which particular rules are good and just and which are unjust and iniquitous. Only then does the right accrue to him of the civil disobedience of certain laws in well-defined circumstances. (Gandhi: A Memoir, William L. Shirer, Pocket Books, NY 1979: 6-8.).

Much remains to be said of the life of Mohandas Gandhi. Let what we have described of his life and work here be sufficient to give insight and understanding to attitudes and strategies as we deal with socio economic and political injustice in the world.

Be assured that we are not advocating that you the student take up arms against your government. Or that you should necessarily opt for civil disobedience as did Gandhi in South Africa and in India. He did what he did with reference to his times. Of course he will always be remembered affectionately by India and with some ambiguity by the British but one thing upon which all can agree is that he became a model for active non-violent resistance. He was anything but passive in the face of social injustice. Later, during the 1960s in the United States, Martin Luther King looked around for an example, a case study if you please, to deal with the socio-economic injustices of African Americans (called Negroes in those days) and he found Gandhi's call to march against the unjust salt tax levied by the British Crown administrators in India. Hence the civil rights movement in the USA was born out of the salt marches of India.

What issues do you face? What concerns do you have for your culture? For your people? How should you lead as a Christian leader? While it's true that Gandhi never converted to Christianity and that he remained a Hindu all his life, it is also true that he admitted to have been enamored by the teachings and life of Jesus and that he read a chapter of the Bible every day. One can't help but raise the question about the ultimate source of Gandhi's inner strength and strategy.

It's time to pause and reflect. What have you learned from the life of Gandhi? What principles can you apply to your situation? Go to the box below and interact with the questions you find there.

Think about it!**Answer Box # 7**

1. How did Gandhi lead by example? Describe in your own words those qualities about Gandhi that made him as an example to others.
2. How was Gandhi able to unite people of such differing socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds?
3. What have you learned from the life of Gandhi that can help you become a strong Christian leader in the face of injustice in your community?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Costly Commitment to Moral Choices

We come to a third example of great leaders who chose different approaches to deal with socio-economic and political conflict. Bonhoeffer believed that Jesus called Christians to not only enjoy the benefits of having peace but also to be peacemakers. He said the disciple of Jesus is called to renounce all violence, for in the Christian life “nothing is to be gained by such methods.” (1963:126). Essentially Dietrich Bonhoeffer began his pilgrimage of pastor ministry in pre-World War II Germany as a pacifist.

Bonhoeffer lived in a time when the political authority in Germany had become corrupt and immoral and he believed that it was a Christian’s right, even his duty toward God, to oppose a government no longer based on natural law. So Bonhoeffer was drawn to the decision to join in the conspiracy to rid Germany and the world of Hitler whom he believed was the anti-Christ and thus his pilgrimage moved from pacifism to taking up arms against evil. His struggle can be helpful to us in light of the life and influence of this great leader and mentor during a troubled time in Germany.

In trying to find a plausible explanation for this action on his part, his biographer, Eberhard Bethge said, Bonhoeffer actively conspired against Hitler “only when all the ways of legal opposition were barred” and when he had “tried other ways to escape his dilemma.” In other words, violence was a last resort and the lesser of evils.

Bonhoeffer’s decision to become an “undercover agent” was a costly one. His involvement should not be construed as a violent approach, at least initially, on his part in political change. In actuality he only assisted efforts to have Hitler imprisoned. Nevertheless, his activities in the movement that eventually made an attempt to set off a bomb to kill Hitler severed his relationships among many of his ecclesiastical and theological fraternity members, for very few of the pastors in the state German Lutheran Church were sympathetic with his

activist notions. Bonhoeffer justified this step on moral and ethical grounds. Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's closest friend and biographer, said this of his friend:

As soon as tyranny, in the name of those who it ruled, threatened the lives of its neighbors and degraded its own name, and as soon as the means came to hand, he felt that on moral grounds the hour for conspiracy had come. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Eberhard Bethge 1967:69)

Let's pause for a moment and reflect on Bonhoeffer's choice. Adolf Hitler is imprisoning Jewish people and any who harbor or protect them. He has invaded neighboring countries breaking national and international treaties. He has constricted the roles of pastors among the German Christians and has offered to restore the German Church to its former status of respectability if its leadership will endorse him. What should be done? What can be done? The church has been absorbed into the government and promised to be rewarded for its loyalty to the state. At risk is one's life, one's family and the welfare of those who depend upon you as a Christian leader. You must assess the quality of life you and your children will have if you decide to go along with the edict of the state. And then you must think of the theological and ethical grounds for making your choices. What are your options?

Go to the box below and interact with the questions there. Keep in mind the options available to Bonhoeffer but at the same time try to put yourself into his position. What would you have done?

Answer Box # 8

1. Was violent action the right choice?
2. Was the option to cooperate with Hitler the right choice to have made?
3. Can you think of another option? What would you have done?

Sequel:

What you don't know to this point, unless you've studied the life of Bonhoeffer prior to this, is that he was implicated in a bomb assassination attempt of Hitler and was placed in prison where he stayed until the end of the war. Hitler left explicit instructions that all those

implicated in the assassination attempt were to be executed in the event the war was lost. Only a few days before the liberation of Berlin by Russian and American troops Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged.

What can we learn?

Among the things we learn from Bonhoeffer is that regardless the position a Christian takes toward unjust authority the decision is never simple or uncomplicated. As you have already learned from your own experience and from your reflections about Bonhoeffer's options no single option is without its problems. One must always choose between moral ambiguity or personal risk and danger.

Of the two men mentioned in this study, Pastor Trochme and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we can reasonably conclude that the former was more exemplary of active non-violent resistance than the latter. This is an oversimplification of course, because these men faced different situations and their moral compasses were set by their own unique ethical and theological presuppositions.

Also, Trochme was not a citizen of Germany, but was a citizen of France, the country being invaded by Germany. Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, was a citizen of the invading nation and therefore likely felt greater responsibility for what his leader, Hitler, did. Trochme had less influence and was less empowered to effect any change at all and had fewer compunctions or reservations about his loyalty to Hitler. In the end both men made choices based on their individual situations and guided by what they believed to be the will of God at the moment.

I think the contribution made by both Trochme and Bonhoeffer is best summed up by G. Leibholz in his memoir he wrote about Bonhoeffer. He said,

It was Bonhoeffer and his friends who proved by their resistance unto death that even in the age of nation-state there are loyalties which transcend those to state and nation. They proved that even in this age nationalism stands under God and that it is a sin against him and his call for fellowship with other nations if it degenerates into national egotism and greed (Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, Communion of the Saints. New York. Harper & Row. 1963:28)

And then there is Gandhi who modeled a more pure form of active non-violent resistance than either Bonhoeffer or Trochme. It can't be said that active non-violent resistance is without violence for it often if not most always evolves into violence. Gandhi was assassinated. Bonhoeffer was hanged. And Trochme spent time in one of Hitler's prisons, though he was released before the war ended. Nevertheless, whatever the consequences, one must look at the results, both negative and positive, of their martyrdoms and their incarcerations before coming to a final assessment. Gandhi's death was influential in bringing to an end the British colonial period in India. His life and work influenced Martin Luther King and helped launch the American experiment with active non-violent resistance that effectively ended widespread discrimination against African Americans in the United States.

The three leaders we have just studied, Trochme, Gandhi, and Bonhoeffer, all went way beyond Christian charity in dealing with the poor and needy, they realized that people need justice, respect, and protection.

For us, you and me, such encounters will be met in largely individual decisions though not at all removed from the response of the Christian community. To make a decision, a choice, to lead others to that choice, one must, like the disciples, draw upon Jesus' example as best we can.

Something to Think About:

As for myself, being convinced that Christians must act on behalf of the poor and those without power, I want to emphasize the peacemaking aspect of managing conflict. I take this position not only from the examples we looked at in this study but also from the life of Jesus.

Matthew 5:1-10

You will recall our reference earlier to the Sermon on the Mount? Let's return to it. You will recall that we mentioned the attitudes that characterize the Believer. These are referred to as the Beatitudes, or more commonly, the attitudes that should be in you and me. Seventh in this string of attitudes is that of "peacemaking." Jesus enjoins his disciples to be those who make peace in the world.

It's interesting to note in this respect that peacemaking follows a progression of attitudes that began with the that of being poor in spirit (spiritual bankruptcy), then mourning that sense of moral and spiritual poverty, out of which attitude emerges meekness, followed by hungering and thirsting for righteousness (right doing/living), which in turn moves one toward being merciful in the world (mercy), which people enjoy transparent relationships with God and with man (pure in heart). It is these people then who are the candidates to become peacemakers in the world. Make no mistake however. Peacemakers are seldom appreciated or honored for their efforts. They are the ones who instead become martyrs for the cause (persecuted).

I bring one final observation from the text of Matthew's Gospel. Joachim Jeremias observed that these verses are organized into two corresponding halves. The first four Beatitudes are "I" oriented. This means that they have to do with the development of the inner person, the inner character of the believer (poor in spirit, mourn, meek, hunger & thirst). The second half is "other" oriented. This means that the second group of four describes the role of the believer in the world. This means further that this other orientation of character development and spiritual hunger are for the purpose of being peacemakers in a troubled world.

Summary & Conclusion:

What have we learned?

We've learned that living Christianly in the world is not simply a matter of faithful church membership. Commitment to Christ is dangerous and risky business. It will involve costly discipleship, making tough and difficult decision and developing strong character.

We learned that there are people who have lived this way and not all of them were members of the Christian church (Gandhi). At the same time even they were informed and challenged by the life of Jesus and they patterned their lives after Him. Others, like Bonhoeffer and Pastor Trochme, were self-consciously followers of Jesus and they were willing to follow him to the death.

Even as we are in this cohort of fellow disciples. In a moment you'll go to your final assignment below. But before you do that we want you to know what you will do next in our study. Unit 6, the final unit in this course, focuses entirely upon Jesus as the ultimate Mediator and as such the ultimate model for you and me as we too assume a role of mediation the Love and Peace of God in an unlovely world.

But now, go to the final box below and do your final assignment.

Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. What did you learn about managing the conflict issue you described in box # 1?
 - a. From Pastor Trochme?

 - b. From Mohandas Ghandi?

 - c. From Dietrich Bonhoeffer?

2. Describe here (or on another sheet of paper) the plan or strategy you will formulate to manage or resolve the issue of conflict you have stated in Box #1. Your plan should include the information in this unit and also that in unit 4.

Conflict Management & Resolution

Unit 6

The Incarnation: Ultimate Model for Managing & Resolving Conflict



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Unit 6

The Incarnation: Ultimate Model for Managing and Resolving Conflict

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Readings:

Athanasius
Elmer pp. 65 - 79
Selected Biblical Passages

Learning Objectives:

- Examine the Incarnational concept as a model for managing and resolving conflict
- Examine how Christ through His Incarnation models dealing with conflict.
- Examine the possibility of being like Christ in dealing with conflict.
- Encourage the student to make conflict management a central focus to their ministry/work
- Examine the notion that conflict management is the ministry Christians are called to do.

Introduction

To this point we've discussed how Christians should think about conflict (Unit 1), establishing the fact that conflict is not only unavoidable but God uses conflict to make us like Him. Then we discussed obstacles or hindrances to managing conflict (Unit 2). We also talked about models or strategies that we can use in dealing with conflict (Unit 3) but emphasized managing conflict is not simply a strategy or method. There are proactive things we need to do such as forgiveness (Unit 4). And then we looked at the larger world of socio political issues and suggested that Christian leaders should be proactively involved in peacemaking and we examined the lives of some Christian leaders who did that in the most difficult times.

We come now to the final unit of our course and in one sense feel we have saved the best until last. Up to this point you have dealt with many areas of conflict management and resolution. You have studied biblical passages and you have been challenged to think personally about conflict issues which we hope have resulted in some heart searching sessions for you. We trust you have spent quality time in solitude and that you have discovered skills, techniques, knowledge and motivation to manage conflict better. We trust you have become a better peacemaker and more aware of the ability to avoid long unresolved conflicts.

This is no guarantee that conflict will end in your life! Indeed it will not. One of the lessons we learn from the life of Job is that we will have trouble in this world. In responding to his wife's suggestion that he curse God and die, to end his troubles, Job said, "*Shall we accept good from God, and not **trouble**? In all this, Job did not sin in what he said*" (Job 2:10). It has been said that peace is not the absence of war. One implication among others is that one can be at peace in times of trouble by learning how to manage it.

We turn our attention now to the Master, who is literally the Master of conflict management and resolution. In this unit we will look to Jesus as our model and ultimate teacher in managing conflict. He did it best though at first blush it would appear his life was a series of conflicts and so one could argue that because of that fact why should we consider Him at all? On the other hand one could also argue that one who was at the center of so much conflict and who ultimately gave His life in the midst of violent conflict knows more about it than most anyone. It is this latter argument that is so compelling to us and so we will look to Jesus as the One who above all others know about reconciliation. He is the teacher who lived it all, spoke it all, and challenges us to follow, not only His example but to follow HIM.

I feel as if we are standing on sacred ground as we approach this subject. It seems we should stop and worship for a while before we approach this Holy Person so filled with love and goodness and selflessness. We enter together a Holy place as we meditate, and indulge ourselves with the One who does it best.

God sought reconciliation with man. He was Divine Other, different from man and distant. So how could man be united with Him, how could man find a way to God?

God is initiator. He is motivated. He was intentional, purposeful, and determined. God sought man. Man was passive, resistant, not listening, not watching and not seeking reconciliation. Man wanted to hide, to avoid.

It is a basic teaching in the story of Adam and Eve that God not only is a communicating God (unlike all other gods) but He sought Adam and Eve after they had sinned. They were wrong, they failed, they hid, but what did God do? He called them, went to them, and then He communicated with grace. He covered them, He communicated with them, He brought justice with grace and

mercy. So must we do the same in our conflicts, when others fail, when our subordinates and family members are creating conflict, we are there to be the hero of the story after God's model to us in the garden.

God chose a personal, interactional, approach. Having created human beings He knew the nature of man and how such an approach would be received. God knew what was required. He entered into the human cultural frame of reference of man. God not only came, He *became*. Charles Kraft observed that *"God in Jesus became so much a part of a specific human context that many never even recognized that he had come from somewhere else."* (*Christianity in Culture* 1980:175).

He could have come as a man and announced Himself as God from the beginning. He could have had the respect and prestige that is His right as God. This would not have worked however, for then he would have had admirers and not friends. The risk would have been less, and the impact low, but predictability would have been high; meaning that few would have been as deeply affected by him as were and that very little would have been unique about his behaviors and teachings

God is the Master communicator. His purpose was an ideal that would be costly to achieve. He came in human terms for his hearers to understand and in full commitment to the hearers reference of human-beingness. He refused to demand of His followers that which they did not want to give. He invited the receivers to follow Him which in itself implies a voluntary response, and then He provides for identification and imitation of His life as a model of communication of His message.

We see here the opportunity for you to grasp the possibility of being the initiator, carrying the load, and finding a way to restoration and restitution because you know the One who did it best. A great advantage we have in this course and the leadership training you now have, is the knowledge you gain, the commitment and opportunity you have, and the amazing work of the Holy Spirit in you, to make you a peacemaker as Christ Himself was and is. This is why we refer to you as the hero in conflict. It is a choice. Often if just one person in a family, an office, an organization, will make an intentional choice to be and do what is needed, that person rescues the situation. Conflict can be solved and peace can result often by just the humble act of saying we were wrong, or admitting that we made a mistake, or humbling ourselves to let the other person lead or be honored instead of ourselves.

God does not act without revealing Himself. He therefore acts in us and some wonderful Supernatural thing happens, that breaks through human barriers and God is revealed, understood and seen. Jesus revealed God, not just knowledge of God, but God Himself.

God seeks to be revealed. He is in conflict with man. He seeks restoration. He then, being dynamic, life-related, life-giving, and Truth, breaks through the barriers we have been talking about, and He is seen.

Isn't this exactly what you want your life to be about? God being seen, not you? Isn't this what we ask Him for in our prayers for ourselves, our family, our country? If ten, this is our prayer, and if God has revealed Himself in the major conflict of all time – being the separation of God and man – then, how much does He want to visit our conflicts, and bring reconciliation? Isn't that what HE is all about?

Emmanuel, God with us. God in human form, in human likeness, living among us. Why? so that we might be reconciled – to Him. But who failed? Who moved away? Who broke the contract? Who discredited the other? Who mocked and thought themselves better than He who was good? Who was at fault?

The Incarnation: God with us. God shows himself in a human face. *The Cross: God for us.* *The resurrection: God in us.* We have a treasure in earthen vessels. Merely human as you are, you are qualified to bear this divine gift to the world. He came. He displayed His gift, then he left and now we human beings, are here to display His gift. His gift of reconciliation.

Purpose

Our purpose here is to understand the central importance of the Incarnation of Jesus to conflict management. We will not take the time or space for an exhaustive discussion of the theological validity of the Incarnation. That is another discussion. Not that that discussion is unworthy or irrelevant. Such a discussion is most important and the student is challenged to research this further. That we will not discuss the Incarnation conceptually as valid or invalid is no measure of our sense of importance of that discussion. To do so however, would take more space than we have in this unit. We will assume that the student accepts the theological validity of the Incarnation and has at least a rudimentary understanding of it. We also assume that the student accepts the historical accuracy of the New Testament account of Jesus coming to earth as reconciler between God and man.

General Understanding of the Term

While our approach will be a Christian one with Christian applications it seems good to provide a general understanding of the term. Within a Christian worldview the term refers to the personification of God in the form of Jesus Christ, the god/man who was sent by God in human flesh as His, God's, representative.

More specifically the Incarnation from a Christian perspective is the belief that the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son or the *Logos* (Word), "became flesh" when he was miraculously conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In the Incarnation, the divine nature of the Son was perfectly united with human nature in one divine Person. This person, Jesus Christ, was both truly God and truly man (ibid).

A Fable

Let's get started with a fable, a fictional story, to help capture the essence of the meaning of Incarnation in a more practical and simple way.

When I was a boy one of my church youth leaders explained the Incarnation in this way. He told us the story of a young boy who loved ants. In fact the boy was so taken with ants that he kept an ant farm housed in a glass-like aquarium in his room. He spent hours observing ants as they made tunnels in the dirt and along the insides of the glass. He watched their behaviors and learned much about life as he watched them. Outside his house there were ant hills in the yard and he would go there too and watch them as they scurried around, dragging huge bits of food and debris to the lip of the ant hill and down into it's tunnels. One day, when he came home from school, he heard an announcement on the radio that an ant eater had gone missing from the local zoo, which was located only a short distance from his home. Frantic with worry the boy ran into his yard going from ant hill to ant hill shouting for them to run and hide, warning them that an ant eater was in the area and they were not safe. But to no avail! The ants continued doing their ant behaviors giving not one hint that they understood the warnings of the boy. In desperation the boy kneeled down in the dust and took some of the ants into his hands and shouted at them, "run, run, hide, hide! – an ant eater is

coming!” Still they gave no heed. Finally, the boy thought, if only I could speak their language! If only I was their size I could go down into the ant hill and warn them!

Biblical Understanding of the Term

Armed with this rudimentary insights let's **pause now** and look to Scripture in order to establish a more precise Biblical understanding of the term. Read the passage below and then go to the box below and interact with the questions that you find there.

1I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— 2for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time (1 Timothy 2: 1-6 NIV).

Answer Box # 1

1. What is Paul's prayer request in verse 2?
2. What implication if any do you see of his desire for those to whom he writes here and conflict management? Do you see any connection at all? Explain.
3. What is "pleasing to God" in this text?
4. What connection do you see between the sentence ""all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of God" and the next sentence, "for there is one God and one mediator?" What significance does the word "for" have in this sentence?
5. Do you think that there is some connection between people knowing God and understanding the role of mediation that Jesus has? Explain

Please note that these words written by the Apostle Paul to his “son” in the Lord, Timothy, are written within the *context of conflict*. Paul specifically mentions in the text that his desire is that everyone lives in peace. It appears that his intention is that they all live in a manner that conflict is being controlled, managed. And it assumes that the absence of peace is a condition common to Timothy’s life else why would Paul talk to him about it?

Also please note the *mediating* role Jesus has in the text between God and human beings. That Jesus mediated salvation on behalf of human beings stands as a core tenet to our Christian faith. This much we can extrapolate from the text both by direct observation and by inference. Notice also that Jesus is modeling mediation in this text as a means to peace making. We suggest from this observation that Jesus’ mediating role between God and man is an example to us that we too are mediators of peace just as we are mediators of salvation as Paul exhorts in this text.

A Theological Understanding of the Term: Athanasius

While we want to develop the concept of the Incarnation along Biblical lines and apply it more concretely to cultural situations it’s important that we not neglect the theological character of the concept. Books have been written and articles without number have been published on the subject. How to deal with the theological component? Perhaps it’s best to let Athanasius represent it for us.

Athanasius of Alexandria (c.298–May 2, 373) was a Christian bishop, the Patriarch of Alexandria, in the fourth century. He is revered as a saint by both the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, and regarded as a great leader and doctor of the Church by Protestants. His work on the Incarnation remains orthodox in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions. He stood *contra mundum* ("against the world") in defense of the biblical doctrine of Christ and as such represents one of the fountainheads of Christology and his work remains one of the definitive statements of orthodox Trinitarianism.

C.S. Lewis says of Athanasius,

“He stood for the Trinitarian doctrine, ‘whole and undefiled,’ when it looked as if all the civilized world was slipping back from Christianity into the religion of Arius—into one of those ‘sensible’ synthetic religions which are so strongly recommended today and which, then as now, included among their devotees many highly cultivated clergymen. It is his glory that he did not move with the times; it is his reward that he now remains when those times, as all times do, have moved away¹.”

Lewis recommends Athanasius as a classical source on the Incarnation, hence the following quote:

When God the Almighty was making mankind through His own Word, He perceived that they, owing to the limitation of their nature, could not of themselves have any knowledge of their Artificer, the Incorporeal and Uncreated. He took pity on them, therefore, and did not leave them destitute of the knowledge of Himself, lest their very existence should prove purposeless. For of what use is existence to the creature if it cannot know its Maker? How could men be reasonable beings if they had no knowledge of the Word and Reason of the Father, through Whom they had received their being? They would be no better than the beasts, had they

¹ <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/history/ath-inc.htm>

no knowledge save of earthly things; and why should God have made them at all, if He had not intended them to know Him? But, in fact, the good God has given them a share in His own Image that is, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and has made even themselves after the same Image and Likeness. Why? Simply in order that through this gift of Godlikeness in themselves they may be able to perceive the Image Absolute, that is the Word Himself, and through Him to apprehend the Father; which knowledge of their Maker is for men the only really happy and blessed life (ibid).

Note the underlined portion above in which the theological rationale for the Incarnation is explained. Namely, that the existence of the created has no purpose outside of some real knowledge of it's Creator. That knowing the Creator is dependent upon a "word" to make it clear. He then goes on to elaborate this central thesis in three chapters in which he describes the Incarnation in theological terms in *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei (On The Incarnation)*.

A Contemporary Illustration: Sadhu Sundar Singh

In your Spiritual Formation course you read about Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889 – 1933), one who has been described as the "St. Paul of India." A former devout Sikh, his is one of the great stories of faith. It was the death of his mother that brought Sundar to a point of despair, grief and ultimately a plan to end his life. He locked himself in his room for three days and nights. During the final night of his desperate vigil he said, *Oh God, if there be a God, reveal yourself to me tonight.*"

His plan, so the story goes, was to go out to the rail line and lay his head on the tracks for the 0500 train to Ludhiana to run him over. At 0445 a bright cloud of light suddenly filled his room and out of the brightness came the face and figure of Jesus. Sundar had been expecting Krishna or another god to appear and yet he was certain it was Jesus who appeared to him! It is reported that Jesus spoke to him, not in Aramaic, English or Greek, but in Hindustani, Sundar's language, saying, *"How long are you going to persecute me? I died for you. For you I gave my life. You were praying to know the right way; why don't you take it? I am the Way."* (*Devotional Classics:288*).

The life of Sadhu Sundar Singh demonstrates the Incarnation in some concrete ways. Please go to the box below and list those you have observed in this brief biography of Sadhu.

Answer Box # 2

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Four Observations from Sadhu Sundar Singh

In addition to or perhaps among the observations you made are these that are significant to us. **First**, note the “pathos” which Sadhu experienced in the loss of his mother. *Incarnational living often includes pain and loss* and it is often the pain that brings near the revelation of God to us and makes us sensitive to His presence.

I recall keenly the feelings of loss and grief I experienced when my father died. Even though I had nine years advance notice of the disease that ultimately took him, the days immediately following his passing into the presence of God were filled with an immeasurable sense of loss. I recall driving to our home in a distant state following the funeral, my children and wife asleep in the car, and tears coursing down my cheeks as small streams of hot lava. I had no sense of anger toward God or any feelings of being unfairly treated. Perhaps that was my first encounter with the reality of my own mortality. In any event the pain, the pathos, was like furrows being carved across my soul and I became deeply aware of the presence of God brought near because of the absence of one who had been the core of my security to that point.

Second, God “revealed” Himself to Sadhu. The purpose of the Incarnation is to reveal God, to unveil him, to make Him known, to make Him to be seen. Jesus walked and talked among his disciples and His words and actions unmasked His Father for them to see. On one occasion they asked him to show them the Father. The text in John 14:1-12 is full of significance in this regard so let’s **pause** here and consider it more carefully.

Go to box #3 below and read the John 14:1-12 three times. The first time read it to gain a **general** understanding of the text. The second time read it to gain a good understanding of the **facts**. The third time through **make observations about specific cultural ways in which God was revealed through Jesus** (write down notes in your notebook of your observations and

Answer Box #3

John 14:1-12

- 1 Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.
- 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.
- 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.
- 4 You know the way to the place where I am going.
- 5 Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?
- 6 Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father
- 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.
- 8 Philip said, Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.
- 9 Jesus answered: Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?
- 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.
- 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.
- 12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

learning).

How did you do? Given the notes you took go to box #4 below and write a 300 word essay on Entitled “Jesus Reveals the Father to His Disciples.” In what specific ways did Jesus reveal His Father to the disciples, particularly Thomas and Philip?

Answer Box #4

Essay: Jesus Reveals Himself to His Disciples

I'm anxious to read what you wrote. Among your observations did you make the most basic one of all? That the purpose for Jesus being among people was to reveal His Father to them? Jesus' comment to Philip was almost an incredulous question; *"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?"* Imbedded in this rhetorical question is the reason Jesus lived with the disciples. It was to demonstrate in physical, material and spiritual terms who His Father was. It's difficult to say that Jesus made it less than clear to anyone who "had ears to hear"! He said directly to Philip in the hearing of others *"anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."* Hence his follow up question, *"How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

It's important to interact with Scripture and to engage it with serious topics as we are doing here. For example, I raised the question earlier about Sadhu Sundhar Singh and how his life reflected in some ways the Incarnation in a more contemporary way. I suggested two things which we've already covered (*pathos/pain and revelation*). Let's return to that theme with two more.

In Ecclesiastics we read that all that is "under the sun" is vanity (Ecclesiastes 1:9, 14). Even knowledge which puffs up and brings us to pride ends up being meaningless to the man who has it all. Solomon, the wisest and most wealthy man in his times, came to the conclusion that all he gained, "under the sun" (i.e. in this life) was meaningless. Thus we are motivated to work for those things that have eternal value and that are not "under the sun" but rather, under the leadership of the Son of God who gives eternal purpose to all things He came to redeem.

Third, this revelation was intuitive/spiritual as well as cognitive/rational.; it came in a "vision" or a "dream." Scripture tells us *"... God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24).* We learned in the Ethics course that post modernism encourages a false spirituality while the period of the Enlightenment tended to see God in purely rational terms. Both of these worldviews encourage an extreme on opposite ends of a continuum while the Incarnation provides a kind of "middle ground" of understanding. It is both rational and spiritual. And is it not the combination of these two that people in a post modern world need to experience?

Blaise Pascal put it this way. He said:

Knowledge has two extremes which meet; one is the pure natural ignorance of every man at birth, the other is the extreme reached by great minds who run through the whole range of human knowledge only to find that they know nothing and come back to the same ignorance from which they set out, but it is a wise ignorance which knows itself. Those who stand half-way have put their natural ignorance behind them without yet attaining the other; they have some smattering of adequate knowledge and pretend to understand everything. They upset the world and get everything wrong (Penses:22).

Pascal explains for us how it is that knowledge, as the Apostle Paul put it, "puffs up" (I Corinthians 8:1). Those who have some knowledge and presume it to be all knowledge are those with just enough of it to think they know all things and it is these who cause trouble. In contrast to knowledge that causes one to be prideful is love/charity, that which edifies or builds others up. Is it not interesting that Pascal, though he speaks of the nature of knowledge, correlates so nicely with the Apostle Paul and with Jesus, who knew all things and yet loved all to the extent that He did.

Pascal demonstrates only one perspective on epistemology. Different cultures have different approaches. For example some cultures emphasize more the intuitive/spiritual side (animisms, ancestor practices, etc) while others tend to emphasize the empirical (academic, materialisms, rationalisms). In educational terms we speak of the "cognitive" and the "affective" domains of

learning. Some epistemologies tend to emphasize the cognitive while others emphasize the affective. Those that emphasize the cognitive tend to confuse factual information with “knowing” and those that emphasize the affective over the cognitive tend to confuse experience as knowing when in fact the biblical term includes both. All epistemologies include both the affective and the cognitive but some emphasize one more than the other.

In my experience as a teacher I’ve often struggled with the juxtaposition of these two concepts. Often I felt frustrated when students demonstrated “knowledge” they had acquired by testing on an exam but failed to demonstrate in other ways, in life in general. I could test knowledge they had acquired by cognition but observed that too often it was incomplete. On the other hand I observed that when I took students into cross-cultural environments where their knowledge was subjected to experience of eating new and different foods, speaking a different language, encountering people of a different culture that the learning curve went up. What I observed overall about knowledge is that when the affective (feeling) domain and the cognitive (rational) domain are both active in a learning environment that knowledge is much more complete and effective.

And finally, **fourth**, Jesus spoke in Hindustani, the language of Sadhu’s heart and culture. One of the most important truths we can learn from Sadhu, from the story of the little boy and his ant farm, is that God speaks to us in cultural terms we can understand. For me one of the most significant truths of the Incarnation is that God reveals Himself through human culture.

I know you’ve completed Unit 2 but that was some time ago. Perhaps you need to refresh your memory! So, let’s pause here for 15 minutes. Please go back to the section entitled “Culture” on pages 49-51 of Unit 2 and read that section again. Then come back to this page and continue.

Finished? Good.

Did you notice in those pages the positive regard for culture that Elmer introduced to you? And don’t forget my comments also. David Bosch, a brilliant South African, spoke of the “abiding paradox” of the Gospel in human cultures.. What this means is that there is always a need to say “yes” to some things you find in culture and a need to say “no” to other things in culture. What we want to emphasize here, and remind you of, is that God seems to work through rather than against human cultures and this is to my mind the central truth of the Incarnation.

In His teachings Jesus spoke Aramaic, the market and local culture language of his disciples and of literally all those who would listen to Him. He wore familiar clothing, ate the food common to all, followed the cultural rules that didn’t conflict with the Kingdom values he taught and demonstrated to all that would listen that God could be understood through contemporary Hebrew culture.

Later, the Apostle Paul came upon the idea that God could be understood among the Gentiles who were coming to Faith (Ephesians 3:1-12). That is a different story and one you will want to undertake at another time in more detail and depth. The book of Acts is really, in its entirety, a study of the expansion of the Way of Christ across cultural boundaries. It is more the history of the expansion of the Christian Movement than it is a history of the development of the Church.

Understandably historians may want to debate this but think about it. Let the idea sink in that perhaps from the get-go of the establishment of the “church”, in the final words of Jesus to His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20), He had in His mind the *ta ethne* (*all the ethnic units of the world*) and that discipleship was to be done across culture boundaries.

In any event, back to Jesus, we find in His interactions with all people numerous examples of His living His teachings through culture more than against it. Notice that His harshest words were against the Pharisees (Matthew “woe” passages) but in doing so he spoke in cultural terms;

- “white painted tombs/sepulchers
- ”strain at a gnat/swallow a camel
- ”easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”

Also, notice the parables Jesus used to clarify His Kingdom teachings. He spoke of

- A “mustard seed,” commonly understood as the smallest seed
- A Lost coin
- A rebellion (prodigal) son
- A rich young ruler

I’ve only referenced a very few examples of metaphors Jesus used but there are many. Jesus taught primarily by parables (stories). He spoke of the need for leaders in terms of “wheat” and “corn” fields. He used fish, birds, flowers and animals to illustrate truths he wanted to get across to His disciples. We could go on and on in this vein but suffice it to say that the Incarnation of Jesus was as much cultural as it is theological. This is to say that Jesus taught (theology) using human events and cultural models (culture) to bring deep affective understandings to those who were willing to listen.

How do we do this? Well, a more thorough reading of the Gospels and of the book of Acts with eyes focused upon “how” Jesus communicated as well as “what” he communicated will help! Let’s visit Duane Elmer one more time. Please go to the Elmer reading at the end of this unit. This section in Elmer is about Mediation. Please read the section and then come back and answer the questions in Box # 5.

Finished? Good! I’m wondering what you learned from this section.

As you no doubt observed, Elmer is writing from a “western” perspective but within a cross-cultural situation. The western missionaries described in the case study are living and trying to work within Indonesian Muslim culture. Go to the box below now and work through the questions you find there.

Answer Box # 5

1. *What was the problem Pat and Steve faced that was so irritating to them?*
2. *What conflict resolution style was most familiar to Pat and Steve?*
3. *What “alternative” came to Pat’s mind as she considered what she should do about the conflict she encountered and where did she learn about it?*
4. *What solution did Pat come up with? Was it effective?*

Mediating/Mediation

I suspect that you are mildly if not very surprised that thinking about “mediation” or a “mediator” as an alternative approach to resolving the conflict Pat and Steve encountered was something they had to learn in a seminar. However, as the case explains, the first approach to conflict in the United States is usually “confrontation.” Now it’s not true that it is the always the first and only approach. Very often mediation is used in American culture but confrontation is commonly the approach for most Americans, as you have already learned from your own experience.

As you continued to read this section in Elmer you no doubt came upon some other ideas about mediation that do not always have positive outcomes. And again, if in your culture mediation is a commonly used approach to conflict management or resolution of interpersonal problems you know that mediation is not without it’s problems. Please go to the box below and state a few of the problems you have experienced in using mediation in your own culture:

Answer Box # 6

1. (example:) *It’s difficult to find a suitable mediator.*
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

I’m anxious to read the negative things that can happen in the use of mediators as you’ve stated them from your culture. An outcome of using mediation is sometimes the mediator becomes entangled in the problem and can sometimes be at risk. Perhaps you have experienced this and if so you can appreciate what happened to Jesus. He became embroiled in mediating salvation for human beings with His Father.

I think His words from the cross, “*Father forgive them for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34) reveal the ultimate risk Jesus took for human beings. He hung between heaven and earth, a literal mediating position, and plead forgiveness from His

Father on behalf of those who had so cruelly mal treated Him. Often the mediator suffers unjust and unpleasant consequences on behalf of those for him he/she seeks to help.

Have you had a similar experience in which you were misunderstood? Abused? Treated unfairly or wrongly when you tried to step in the gap? Perhaps you loaned money to a relative to help them start a business or help them get out of a financial jam and you lost your investment? Perhaps you spoke on behalf of someone, gave a positive recommendation so someone could get a good job and them found yourself slandered?

In the box below (#8) please describe any event(s) you have had in which you served the role of a mediator and in which you were treated unfairly. Please describe the event.

Answer Box # 7

Now that you've described a situation in which you feel you were treated unfairly, unjustly or abused in some way we want to challenge you to think more "incarnationally" about it. Can you do that? It might be helpful to ask some questions of yourself at this point.

1. What might God be doing in the life of the person who treated me this way?

2. Is there something larger happening than I'm aware of?
3. Does this situation provide an opportunity for me to act on behalf of the other person?
4. Can God use my response or reaction to this situation to communicate or reveal the Grace of God to the parties involved?
5. How can I live incarnationally because of this situation?
6. Does this situation provide an opportunity for me to be a mediator?

At this point it is fairly obvious the direction we are trying to move you toward. We want you to understand that as a Christian leader you too are a mediator between God and human beings. You too are to “incarnate” the gospel of Jesus into a fallen and sinful world.

It's one thing to acknowledge in Scripture that Jesus was a mediator and that He lived incarnationally in his life and ministry. It's another thing for you and me to do the same. Your response might well be that Jesus was God! He was divine! He could do what I as a human being cannot do. You have a good point! It's true. Jesus was more than you and me. But we must not let the divinity of Christ negate His humanity! Yes, Jesus was fully divine but he was also fully human. We have theological terms to describe this but let's not go there. Let's stick with the Incarnation! He said to His disciples, as the father has sent me so I send you. He said that his disciples would do greater things than he would do. His humanity and his divinity were always at work in his life. He wept. He hungered. He feared separation from his Father in the Garden. He healed the sick. He performed miracles. And he died a horrible, painful very human death. His divinity and his humanity were always a mixture of things.

While it's true that mediation and reconciliation are key roles that Jesus plays, ministries He performs through His life and death, it is also true that not all people were free from conflict as a consequence of what He did. Not all people were reconciled to God. Indeed, it's doubtful that Jesus expected His ministry to be 100% effective. Judas is described as the “son of perdition,” meaning one who would be damned or lost.

Though Jesus is described as the Prince of Peace his life and ministry was not one that produced it nor was that even what He set out to do. He said

32 Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

34 Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

35 For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—

36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. (Matthew 10:32-36 NIV-UK)

What is intended in this text is not a justification for war or for turning people against each other. Rather it is the realization Jesus had, his foreknowledge, that people would be divided because of His reconciliation ministry. Reconciliation is not cheap! It cost Jesus the most extreme loss any human being has ever experienced, separation from His Father.

Again, the question is raised as to Jesus' example and our responsibility as Christian leaders to follow. Are we expected to do as He did? His own words are instructive:

13 You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am.

14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13:13-18 NIV-UK)

Washing the feet of His disciples was a demonstration of Jesus' servant role and extended, as the text suggests, to more than washing each other's feet. The greater issue is stated in verse sixteen; namely that the servant is not greater than his master and the promise in verse seventeen that they would be blessed if they did what he modeled for them to do.

What is the bottom line? What is the conclusion we are suggesting for Christian leaders? We are saying that just as Jesus incarnated the Gospel and its implications to the world he lived in so are we to incarnate the Gospel in our world. He said clearly, *"As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world"* (John 17:18).

Summary and Concluding Remarks

A child of divorce might be confused when taught that we must love our family and be reconciled, because he sees his first teachers unable to reconcile. How then with this model does he learn about reconciliation? How then does our world look at the Church and understand God's reconciliation to man, when it's members cannot reconcile?

There are times when Christian leaders need a mediator. We all need mothers, counselors, friends, pastors, etc. regardless of our role in life. Thus, we can be in need of accountability and help with conflict, or we can ourselves be a help in conflict. It is good to humble oneself and ask for help when needed. Finding the right person is increasingly difficult when one is a leader.

We want to encourage you to consider your spouse. This person likely knows you well and is on your side. Likely a spouse can point out how the other person might be feeling and thinking, or can help you avoid common pitfalls.

Some of us are especially called and gifted to be peacemakers. If you know of such a mentor in your past or present situation, it is good to seek their advice. The Scripture tells us it is wise to have many counselors. This is important for the leader who thinks he stands alone and cannot admit his faults to others.

Beyond our own needs for help, it is exciting to think of learning the new skills which will qualify us to be better at helping others in counsel, mediation and peacemaking. If we know how to resolve conflict, and bring people to reconciliation it is a wonder ministry of God. It is His intention on the earth.

As you resolve your one conflicts, and we mean all conflicts, and intentionally have a clear conscience before God and man, then you are qualified to assist others. Many people give counsel and advice and take high positions before they handle these matters. Many of our political leaders are great examples of how not to do this! We often excuse them when their past relationships, which have not been mended, come back to haunt them, because we ourselves are guilty of

similar unresolved issues. Obviously these are not situations where we can ask God's blessing on the work or ministry of these individuals.

A most fulfilling life is one where a minister and/or leader can have a clean record, a clear conscience with all people, and approach others with integrity saying "this is how I did it and I can lead you to do the same."

It is a serious question and a most difficult problem. Let us go back to the Incarnation.

Jesus mediation (His incarnation) was unique in that His death, burial and resurrection was and is efficacious in a way that Christians living in their world communities are not. (Wisley p 305)

My reference to the incarnation of Jesus as a divine model is only to suggest that his followers are to "mediate" God's grace to each other and to the world. As a mediator Jesus came into the world not only as the incarnate Son of God (John 3:16) with regard to "being" truth, but He also had a responsibility of communicating truth.

He demonstrated this mediating role after showing His wounded hands and side to His disciples. He said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father hath sent Me so I am sending you." (John 20:21) Whatever else He communicated He wanted the disciples to continue the ministry He began. Would you agree that His primary ministry was that of reconciliation?

As preparation for this ministry He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Was Jesus suggesting that they needed God the Holy Spirit or they would not be able to continue His ministry? One thing is certain; His disciples were enjoined to live in a largely unbelieving world as mediators of God's message of salvation, as verbal communicators of Christian truth and as living demonstrations of Christian faith in the existential realities of the Greco/Roman and Jewish world. Thus, I use the term that Christians are called and enabled to be a "mediating" community.

Jesus was the embodiment of all truth and not merely One who spoke "truths" or true things. He is the Source of Truth for in Him the seeker of truth can find his quest realized. As the mediator/reconciler/healer par excellence, Jesus' nature is unique to Him and to Him alone. Nevertheless, there is an Incarnational principle that still holds firm. Christians around the world should be the embodiment of God's message in their manner of speech and their responses toward others, their lifestyles, teaching, fellowship, service, proclamation, and particularly when under stress and persecution.

Truth must suffuse all aspects of the daily walk and life of Christians in the world, just as it characterized the totality of Jesus' life (Eph 6:4). Reconciliation is God's work. We often think that these conflicts of life are troubling, annoying and in the way of God's work. Believe me when I say, resolution of conflict IS God's primary work!

Conclusion: How are we to accomplish this?

In a sense this final point is what the entire course is about. Conflict management is more than a strategy to heal relationships, though it is that; and it is more than finding approaches or models of managing conflict in difficult situations, though it is that too. As Christians and as leaders it is ultimately living our lives in a manner that demonstrates, illustrates, exemplifies the Heart of God and the sacrificial life of Jesus. It is not avoiding conflict. It is living Christianly through conflict.

We do this by establishing a perspective on conflict that it is an unavoidable part of living in the world. We can no more avoid conflict than we can avoid breathing or eating. Nor should we wish to. In these later years of our lives we wonder how often we prayed, or tried to pray, our way out of conflict, using avoidance as the primary approach to it. And

we wonder how many opportunities we may have missed to demonstrate the grace and love of God to a fallen world. How often did we choose confrontation instead of care fronting? How often was our pride in the way and did we not have the best interest of others as our primary objective in ministry? I'm afraid we must answer these questions with, "more frequently than we'd like to admit." Perhaps our failures speak more loudly than our successes and that these in some way qualify us to work among you.

We do this by practicing forgiveness. I'm fairly sure if the question were raised in a theological forum to define forgiveness most of us would give a passing answer. Moreover if the question were raised as to how often we have forgiven or how frequently we practice forgiving others their offenses against us, I wonder what score we would get. We manage conflict by extending forgiveness when we are most sorely hurt and abused by others. I'm hopeful that we, in this cohort can add our names to those of Jesus, Gandhi, Andre Trochme and Bonhoeffer, as those who responded to conflict and managed to resolve it using the Biblical resources at our disposal.

As we forgive others, God forgives us, and we then role-model and teach others how to forgive. Our children become peace makers, our homes are at peace, and we take with us an atmosphere and attitude of possibility into the world where we work and influence others.

The intention of this course is to bring students into this position in Christ. Paul prayed that he would have a clear conscience so he would not "shipwreck" and he modeled for us how to do that. As we pray and ask God to reveal to us our failures in relationship God will keep us from shipwreck.

We do this by looking for creative options that are culturally relevant in situations of conflict. By knowing who we are in Christ and by looking to others in their cultural contexts we can find new ways and approaches to manage our way through difficult situations. The cross-fertilization of culture ideas and concepts we've looked at in this course are simply representative of others you can find on your own as you live out your Christian life as a leader in your community.

We do this by applying our biblical models and Christian examples in the larger geo political and socio economic world of which we are but a small part. The Gospel must relate to the larger community as well as the smaller one. Economic and social structures that fail to represent God's standards for human rights and justice must be infiltrated by Christian values lived out and practiced by Christian leaders within their own cultural contexts. While this is a difficult and sometimes risky thing to do we have examples of men and women who took that dangerous route.

We do this by practicing the Incarnation in our work and in our ministries. As Jesus "enfleshed" His Father to His world so we are to flesh out the gospel and its moral content to the world of relationships God has given to us. Indeed the capstone of all we have done in this course is really very simple and very basic. It is to live the life of Jesus, as His Father instructed Him, in our day to day lives. Will the servant be greater than His Master? Must the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die? Yes, it must, if it is not to remain alone.

We've unloaded an awful lot on you in this section. Take a few moments now to think about what we've said by considering two questions. Go to the answer box below (#9) and reflect on the questions there. Then with as much transparency as you can muster please answer them as best you can. Don't feel condemned. And don't feel you are being manipulated or

asked to reveal things about yourself that others should not know about. We are simply asking you to as honest and open with yourself as you can be. Do the best you can.

Think About It!

Answer Box # 8

1. Have you been working for the Kingdom, but not giving proper emphasis to God's work in reconciliation? Please explain.

2. What areas of conflict have you been unwilling to surrender to the recognition that God has the power, the desire, the purposefulness in bringing reconciliation to a difficult conflict. List and describe as best you can.

Some Closing Remarks and Realistic Goals

Following are eight final remarks we think are important summaries to take with you as you complete this course. A lot has been said, both as general comments and as specific information. We know that you are not likely to remember it all. So what follows here are some specific final comments and goals we think will make a difference in how you manage conflict and seek resolution.

Eight Final Remarks

1. We suggest that you **'pick your battles'**. Some issues are worth losing your life for and others are not. We must always keep in mind that martyrdom is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church but it can be used only once! Some issues are worthy of conflict, others are not. You cannot fight all the battles you believe in and you cannot deal with conflict on every level. You must evaluate what your risks are in conflict and then decide if the conflict is worth the risk. A person who is at conflict at home is wise not to take on more conflict at work if it can be avoided, even if the issues are important.
2. **Timing is important.** The Preacher admonishes that there is a time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3). We would suggest that there is a time for conflict and a time to avoid it. Wisdom helps us to know the timing of all things
3. **On the job** we suggest you consider this wisdom. If you are unhappy and see problems in your work, it is wise to speak to your supervisor or the leaders of the organization in an appropriate manner and at the right time. A well established relationship is helpful and can make a difference. Different cultures handle this approach differently but it is unwise to cause others to be unhappy and disgruntled if they are doing well. If you cannot speak with those responsible who can make a difference, then you might want to consider leaving the organization. This is a high risk decision, but one option you do not have as a peace maker is that of causing problems. If you remain and choose not to deal with those in authority, then you must, for the present, submit to the leadership and live in harmony with all involved.
4. We regard the issue of **going to Court** in a conflict as a costly and often unsatisfactory solution. For one thing, the judge can rule against you and you will be worse off than before. In court, and with an attorney, you choose to let someone else speak for you and organize the argument. That may not be helpful. Scripture advises that we settle out of court suggesting arbitration, peacemaking, and reconciliation before going to Court.
5. If there is no other choice, or if you are taken to court, **be wise, informed and skilled** in approaching the matter. Take your time. Do not go quickly, but pray, consult, and find the best approach to a legal dispute.
6. The same would be true in involving the **police or military** in a dispute. If there is any hope on your part for reconciliation and restoration which are our first objectives, then do not involve these people. If there is fear of physical harm and you need protection, it might in some cases be necessary.
7. It is the **role of the Church to bring a conscience** to government as happened in Uganda regarding AIDS education and the issue of abstinence. The church must speak for those who cannot speak for themselves; the church must bring a conscience to the government if laws of government are wrong for society.
8. At the same time, **do not expect government to solve your problems.** Living out and managing conflict in your family and community is the best way to influence your community government. When people observe your role-modeling then they can become wise righteous leaders and able to participate effectively in government.

With these eight comments in mind may we suggest nine realistic goals for you as a Christian leader to set for yourself? Of course these can be accomplished only through Christ living in you.

Realistic Goals to Set

1. Forgive everyone who has ever offended you and maintain a clear conscience.
2. Ask forgiveness of everyone you have ever offended, thereafter become quick to apologize.
3. Make a charitable judgment of others with grace and mercy.
4. Resolve to learn how to cultivate a culture of peace in your home, community, church and workplace.
5. Learn how to respond to criticism and make this a tool for improving yourself and your organization.
6. Become an example of a leader who deliberately manages conflict and seeks resolution.
7. Teach your children and those you influence to be peacemakers.
8. Live your life in such a way that you bring a conscience to other leaders. Assist where and when you can in restoring peace in situations of conflict.
9. Resolve to find a refreshing attitude and perspective on God’s plan for peace and unity in the church.

Final Assignment

Your **final assignment** is a comprehensive task. We’d like you to review the previous 5 Units and select models/paradigms and concepts that you feel are relevant to a situation of conflict you have been facing or experiencing. It could be a situation that you described in a previous unit or it can be an entirely new different, new one. Organize your thoughts on another sheet of paper. Then please write a task plan how you will deal with the situation of conflict. If you decide to use a situation of conflict from a previous unit then simply bring it up to date using new insights you’ve gleaned from latter units. You may use the other side of the paper or place another sheet of paper in your notebook if you need it.

Final Assignment

Task Plan: Managing/Reconciling the Situation of Conflict: _____

Reading

The following reading is taken from those previously mentioned textbooks:

Elmer, Duane. *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. 1993, pp. 66-79.

We thank the Publishers for granting us permission to integrate the respective chapters of the books in the DAI workbook.

Chapter 5 MEDIATION AND THE MEDIATOR

In all fighting, the direct method maybe used for joining battle but indirect methods will be needed to secure victory.

SUN TZU

Culture shock blasted the ears of Pat and Steve the very first night they moved into their house in Jakarta, Indonesia.¹ As they were getting their children ready for bed, talking and praying, there was a sudden siren blast. It was the Muslim call to prayer.

Steve and Pat soon learned that the sirens source was very near their house, with the speaker pointed in their direction. The siren went off several times each day, and for them these blasts were not a major problem. But the nightly disruption of their family time proved unbearably frustrating. If the children were put to bed early, they would be awakened by the noise of the siren screeching through their house. Sometimes it frightened them.

With her patience wearing thin, Pat resolved to change the situation. Back home in the United States a person with this sort of problem would just go to the proper authorities, explain the problem and hope a solution could be worked out. If not, one would appeal to higher authorities and to noise-abatement laws, if necessary.

As Pat prepared her speech to the authorities at the local mosque, a thought crossed her mind. Shortly before departing for Indonesia, she and her husband had attended a seminar on conflict resolution in the Two-Thirds World. The content started coming back to her, and quickly she realized that the approach she had envisioned would not work. In fact, it could do great damage. There was an alternative, and she began to think about how to make it happen. She would have to take an indirect approach.

Using a mediator was one of the seminar suggestions. But who? And how? Would it work? The whole idea seemed very awkward and unnatural. Yet it was worth a try. What was there to lose?

That evening, the guard Pat and Steve had hired to watch the house each night appeared for his usual 6:00 shift, and Pat realized that this person might be the answer she was seeking. He didn't have much status, and since she was new in Jakarta she had no idea of his network of relationships. Nevertheless, it was worth a try.

She explained the situation to the guard, and he in turn began to talk with other household guards in the area about Pats dilemma. Eventually an area supervisor of these guards heard the story. The supervisor, as it happened, had a friend who worked at the mosque. The friend in the mosque talked with someone in authority.

This process of communication took a number of days. In the busyness of settling into her new home, Pat left behind her concern about the siren and almost forgot her conversation with the guard. But one night she realized that it had been some time since the mosque siren had disrupted the evening talks and prayers with her children. Had she simply become used to the sound and failed to notice it? Or had something changed?

The next night she listened carefully. The siren went off at the appointed time, but it was definitely quieter, and it seemed as though the loudspeaker was no longer pointed directly at their house.

"It works! Mediators really work!" was Pats gleeful conclusion as she reported the story to me. Without realizing it, she had actually combined two indirect strategies for handling the conflict. The first, mediation, is the subject of this chapter; Pats other strategy will be taken up in chapter six.

The Mediator

Using a mediator, a third person who acts as a middle person or intermediary between two opposing parties, is a common indirect strategy for handling conflict in the Two-Thirds World.² By definition a mediator avoids face-to-face confrontation, thereby minimizing the possibility of loss of face, shame or dishonor for both parties. David Augsburg elaborates:

Western styles of conflict resolution value one-to-one direct address, confrontation, self-disclosure, negotiation, and resolution. . . . In the other two-thirds of the world, conflicts are immediately referred to a third party—an older, wiser, neutral, skilled family member or a trusted person from the community. Triangulation serves to save face for both parties and to reduce shaming in the system.³

The following story shows how a mediator can help resolve an interpersonal conflict.

Don and his wife, new missionaries in the Philippines, were progressing nicely in language and culture learning. They enjoyed the Filipinos. Their children, however, were having some difficulty. As they made their way to and from school, the Filipino children would tease them, call them names and sometimes throw things at them. The young Americans dislike for the Filipino children soon approached hatred. They wanted to go home, go anywhere but the Philippines.

Don knew most of the parents of the offending Filipino children and entertained the idea of having a talk with them. He would be friendly, warm and very careful in handling the topic so as not to offend them.

But after pondering this approach, he discarded it. The risk was too great. A direct, face-to-face carefronting, even carefully done, would almost certainly cause them shame and loss of face. Any future ministry Don might have with those people would be jeopardized. How would the Filipinos handle a situation like this?

Don had been making friends with the merchants at the local market-place. Over the weeks he had observed that everyone related easily and with confidence to the butcher. In fact, in a rather uncanny way, this man seemed to be the broker of information for the entire community—an informal opinion leader. Don could build on this information to solve the problem.

One day, as Don approached, the butcher responded with a cheery

"Hello, Mr. Collins. How are you today?" Don replied, "I am not so well today." "Oh, Mr. Collins, what *is* the problem?"

"We are feeling sadness," said Don.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Collins. What causes you to be sad?"

"It *is* our children; they are very unhappy."

"Mr. Collins, that *is* very sad. What causes them to be unhappy?"

"Well, as they travel to school and back home they have some difficulties."

"What kind of difficulties, Mr. Collins?"

"It seems that sometimes rocks or sticks are thrown and unkind words are said to them. My wife and I love this country and the Filipino people so much. We are very sad that our children do not enjoy the Philippines as we do."

"I am so-o-o sorry, Mr. Collins. This is very bad. We are glad to have you in our country and want all of your family to be happy here. We must hope that your children will soon be happy too."

At this point Don bought some meat and, with a friendly farewell, and moved on.

Within two or three days the problem was solved. His children were no longer being bothered, and in a short while their attitude began improving. What had happened?

After Don left the butcher, other shoppers had come by the butcher shop. After a greeting and "How are you?" from each shopper, the butcher would mention that he was sad today. The shopper would show sympathy and ask why. The butcher would say he had been talking to the new American in the community—"the long nose," a term often used for referring to Americans. The visitor would ask more questions until eventually the butcher unfolded the story.

Before long another community member would come into the shop, and the same scenario would transpire. As each visitor to the butcher shop made his or her way into other parts of the marketplace, the situation repeated itself. No fingers would be pointed, no names mentioned, no one would be directly confronted. Yet gradually everyone knew the problem, knew the "offenders" and knew what must be done.

Even though everyone knew which parents had children in the community and which children were likely to be responsible, no direct accusations were made; no one would be shamed by being held responsible for not showing proper courtesy and hospitality to the new guests. The community valued smooth and harmonious relationships, unity and peace among its members, and it had responsible ways of responding to disruptions. And while a few families may have been to blame, the entire community held itself accountable for maintaining its values, especially making the guests in their culture feel welcome.

Misinterpreted Overtures

Becoming aware that Don's children were feeling alienated, the community members began to find out why this was happening. It was not just the responsibility of the parents; everyone in the small community got involved, since what affected one member affected everyone. Everyone felt the burden of the problem and the burden of collective shame, so everyone shared in the effort to make things right. My Filipino friends tell me that the following is probably an accurate rendering of the events.

The Filipino parents and other community members probably began inquiring about the relationship between the local children and Don's children. They discovered that their own children were trying to make friends and believed that they were showing themselves friendly, but that the Americans refused to respond and instead drew inward. They seemed to resist the overtures of the Filipino children.

The parents and community members then asked what the young Filipinos did to show friendliness; the children responded that they tried to get their attention by tossing an occasional stick or stone. Hearing this, the parents realized that the American children would not interpret rock-throwing as friendship. They suggested alternative tactics to show their good intentions and develop friendships.

In Filipino culture, as in any culture, children have their ways of initiating relationships and showing the desire for friendship. Americans, of course, had no basis for interpreting the sticks and stones as friendship. But if we think about it in terms of how grade-school boys often express their interest in girls, it may be similar. The boy, in his awkwardness and bashfulness, will playfully throw paper at the girl, pull her hair or perform some other "unsocial" activity to get her attention and, he vaguely hopes, her friendship. It seems the same kind of thing was operating with the Filipino children.

Don's handling of the situation showed astute cultural insight. Doing the culturally appropriate thing in this delicate situation won him the respect of the people and therefore gained him credibility as a person and as a Christian. It is easier to listen to someone you respect, and Don had a message he hoped would be heard.

Analysis

Matsumoto provides an interesting analysis of this orientation toward group harmony from the Japanese perspective, but his insights have broader application. "In the West the relationship between Self and

Other is understood on the basis of confrontation,"⁴ whereas in Japan "relationships are not based in power confrontations, but on harmony and balance."⁵ He states that the strong dichotomizing between *self* and other in the Western worldview allows for interpersonal confrontations. No such sharp distinction exists in more holistic cultures, where definitions of "self and "other" are blurred, reflecting mutuality, interdependence and contextual flexibility in a complex matrix of relationships.⁶

Note that even through a mediator it would still be very easy for Westerners to make direct accusations. Such an approach may seem culturally appropriate, but actually it would only aggravate the situation, for then the accused loses face not only before the accuser but also before the mediator and anyone else who may find out. Shame is compounded. It would be bad enough to be shamed by the guest in the community, but to be shamed before the esteemed mediator would be unbearable. As a general rule, blame should not be placed on another, not even through a mediator.

Exceptions to this principle do exist, however. Imagine two people in conflict with each other, with a third party, a mediator, standing between them. One party articulates a very direct complaint about the other person but speaks and looks only at the mediator. It is almost as if the opposing person is not present, yet he or she has heard and seen everything.

The mediator now turns to the other party and begins to repeat the accusations, but more objectively and with *less* passion. The other party now has her or his turn to respond while the mediator (and the accuser) listen. The mediator again repeats the story but attempts to clarify it and reduce the emotional pitch. Little by little, a resolution *is* reached.

This process seems a bit comical, even foolish, to the Westerner, but it works rather effectively in certain cultural contexts. It *is* an effective strategy for several reasons. First, the party speaking to the mediator is not directly putting down the other person, even though an onlooker may think so. The accusation is still indirect. Second, the mediator usually will not repeat each person's identical words, since the opposing party has been there and heard everything. The mediator sifts the words and accusations and tries to get at the core of the matter. Thus the mediator interprets and rephrases the words so they will be heard more accurately. Third, most conflicts have an emotional component. One party may be shouting his or her side of the story to the mediator, but the mediator, not caught up in the emotion of the matter, speaks more quietly and objectively, thus bringing an element of calm. While appearing awkward to the Westerner, this strategy has brought reconciliation and restored peace in many conflicts.

The Unwitting Mediator

Businesspeople, missionaries and most other Western expatriates, because they have perceived status and power, are often called upon to play the mediator role without realizing it. Someone comes to them with a problem that has arisen between her- or himself and another person. The Westerner, believing that sensitive face-to-face confrontation is the best way to handle conflict, tells the individual to go and talk it out with the other person. The Western Christian easily and confidently adds, "This *is* the biblical thing to do."

Two-Thirds-World people tend to find such a course of action quite unnatural, if not repulsive. They possess neither skill nor experience indirect confrontation. Furthermore, they wonder why the Westerners refuse to help. They have power and influence. The situation could be handled rather painlessly if they would only be willing to mediate. The indigenous people are confused, hurt and may lose confidence in the Westerners, who have the power but appear unwilling to solve the problem.

The Westerner, on the other hand, finds the indigenous person rather irresponsible in not wanting to face up to the problem. Words like "immature," "adolescent," "lacking in leadership" and "timid" may be applied to the person refusing to confront. With these thoughts lodged in the Westerner's mind, a distrust *sets* in, placing a strain on the relationship.

Massive miscommunication *is* taking place. Both parties are doing exactly what *is* appropriate in their respective cultures. But when each comes to the relationship with only one set of lenses to interpret a given situation, the result *is* misunderstanding and a weakening of the relationship. The motives of both are innocent, but the consequences are serious.

The Purpose off a Mediator

While most mediators become involved to resolve conflict, some have other purposes. For example, a mediator may be used to *cause* conflict. Throughout Africa and parts of Asia, particularly India, witch doctors, priests, sorcerers and other kinds of mediums are available to cast spells, perform incantations, practice exorcisms and communicate with the dead. While the mediator performs many of these activities in order to acquire some favor for the seeker (such as getting over an illness, obtaining a job, being healed of infertility), many times the mediator is called on to bring ill upon the seekers enemy. The mediator may cast a spell, pronounce a curse or require the seeker to do something that will bring negative consequences upon the enemy. Such activity *is* intended to settle a grievance. It is an indirect way of getting even, settling the score, seeking justice.

People who are called on to act as mediators usually possess some power, influence, status, prestige or authority. They operate at different levels in society, and depending upon one's own status, and to some extent ones relationships, one mediator will be chosen over another. It is always preferable to choose a mediator who understands your own perspective and holds considerable influence with the other party. Yet if the mediator *is* perceived as too partial to be objective, he or she will be discounted by the other party.

Matsumoto explains the purpose of a mediator: "The need for a mediator *is* a sign that unity *is* the ideal in relationship." There is more to this rather basic platitude than is first obvious. In the Two-Thirds World, conflict is a violation of community solidarity and peace, not just a breach between two people. Bringing shame on another *is* not an individual act but necessarily affects immediate and extended family, friends and associates.

This intense interdependence and group orientation confuses the Westerner, who thinks of the individual as a free, independent, self-determining person. But the group spirit has been firmly entrenched throughout much of the world—probably because group survival de-pended on it. In solidarity people can stand against an army; in solidarity people can survive natural disaster by sharing resources; in solidarity people have a stable history and identity; in solidarity people enjoy protection and security; in solidarity people celebrate many friendships. Solidarity has numerous benefits, and the mediator serves as their guardian.

The **Ultimate Punishment and Shame**

Romanucci-Ross, commenting from her research in a Mexican village, offers yet another perspective. Although group solidarity must not be jeopardized, it is really the offenders place in the group that is in jeopardy. Persistent or gross violations of solidarity will result in the offenders becoming "que no es de aqui—an outsider and nonentity, not of here or of anywhere else either."⁸ One's membership in the group and one's individual identity are inseparable. To be cast out of a group is to be stripped of identity, even personhood. Continual shaming of others calls forth the ultimate punishment—the shame of being an outcast, no longer a member of a group, outside of solidarity, unprotected, vulnerable and exposed, living in a perpetual state of shame and nonidentity.

Perhaps this is part of what Matthew (18:17) and Paul (1 Cor 5:11-13) had in mind:

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector [an outsider, outcast, nonperson].

But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

The person who habitually continues in sin with seemingly little or no effort to change, yet still wants to be known as a Christian, should not be treated as one who is in solidarity with the church. That seems to be the thrust of the two statements.

The **Mediator's Intentions**

Matsumoto expands on the ultimate intention of the mediator. Mediation takes place, obviously, between two people or two parties. The intended outcome *is* not simply for mutual tolerance, physical coexistence or a superficial feeling good about each other. It goes deeper. "Self and Other are completed in the relationship. Both have a feeling of identity and certainty, through the work of the mediator."⁹

The mediator serves not simply to reconcile, interpret and negotiate but, much more positively, to *integrate* two parties. The mediatorial role is not to strive for a plurality of individuals but for a "strong consciousness of belonging to the same group"¹⁰ that can be characterized as a bonding of the hearts, minds and souls, a bonding in which identities mingle and unite. Thus personhood *is* discovered and affirmed in community.

Only in such a context does being a pagan or outcast become the ultimate shame and punishment. Solidarity of this nature *is* a concept hardly understood in Western cultures and rarely experienced. Yet the Bible employs extensive language to highlight similar values: "body," "church," "unity," "oneness" and "fellowship." One thing is certain: conflict-resolution skills are important for the church everywhere.

Characteristics of a Mediator

Foremost, the mediator needs to be seen as a respected, neutral, objective third party who is capable of weighing out fairness in the resolution of a conflict. The mediator must be trusted by both parties to come up with a solution that will protect them from shame. While the central issue is justice, the outcome needs to be win-win, no losers. There are some exceptions to this, but generally it holds true. The abilities to listen impartially, suspend judgment and accurately gather and assess information are other important characteristics. Finally, to function effectively the mediator must have power (financial, status, position), so that both parties will take seriously and abide by the mediator's judgment. If one party refuses to cooperate, he or she should fear the possibility of being shamed and losing face before the mediator and the whole community. If that real possibility does not enter the minds of both parties, the mediator will be ineffective.

In several countries mediators are still used to find a bride for a man. Usually this is a job for the parents, and they in turn employ the services of a mediator. Because this event takes much planning, the parents will try to identify the mediator well in advance. Since these services some-times require remuneration, money must be saved. Or in some cases parents try to do a number of favors for the mediator so that he or she will feel indebtedness and perform the service as a kind of repayment.

The parents will try to get the most influential mediator possible, to boost their chances of being approved by the potential bride's parents. The young woman's parents will not want to risk shame by turning down a request from such an important person—so the reasoning goes. Of course, the higher-ranked the mediator, the higher the cost of the services.

Everyone experiences a certain amount of stress in the process. The parents of the potential groom wonder how much money it will take and who *is* the best person for that money. Should they spend more or even borrow money in their effort to secure the best mediator and the best bride? The young woman's parents experience *stress* since they want their daughter to marry the best person available, which usually means the person with the most education, status or wealth. (In these situations love *is* generally a nonissue until after the marriage.) If the young woman's parents turn down the mediator who represents the

would-be groom and his parents, will a better prospect come along? The mediator must be successful most of the time or will lose the status of a good mediator.

Complicating the process *is* the fact that turning down the mediator is also a snub of the potential groom and his parents. The snub, real or perceived will likely generate conflict between the families. If the parties are not careful, the entire community can take sides. One way to alleviate this eventuality *is* for the young woman's family to identify a flaw that would make her a *less* desirable prospect. They might say, "She *is* sickly," or "She may not be able to bear children," or "She will make a poor mother and worker." Although none of these statements may be true, and probably everyone knows they aren't, they do provide a way for the young man's parents to withdraw their request for a perfectly legitimate reason. Everyone saves face, at least at the surface, and peace *is* pre-served.

Biblical Principles

Did God ever face conflict? How did he handle it? God was, in fact, involved in the greatest conflict in history, a conflict that was cosmic in scope. The conflict, caused by humanity's sin, resulted in a broken relationship between creature and Creator. Here began a global conflict of a proportion unique in history. How should God handle it? Face to face? Direct confrontation? Carefronting? Avoiding? We can be eternally grateful that God chose none of these.

The enmity between God and humans could be healed and unity restored only through a mediator—an indirect method. Only one person was qualified to mediate this cosmic conflict, Jesus Christ (On 3:17; Heb7-8).

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men. (1 Tim2:5-6)

Kenneth Wuest defines *mediator* in this verse as "one who intervenes between two, either in order to make or restore peace and friendship or to form a compact or ratify a covenant."¹¹ Wuest continues: "Our Lord is a mediator in that He interposed Himself by His death, and made possible the restoration of the harmony between God and man which had been broken by sin. The distinctive word for man here *is* not *aner*, a male individual, but *anthropos*, the . . . generic term."¹²

William Hendriksen states that "Christ is the One who has voluntarily taken his stand between the offended God and the offending sinner, in order to take upon himself the wrath of God which the sinner has deserved, thereby delivering the latter."¹³

Consider Romans 5:10-11: "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." From this passage Hendriksen draws great encouragement for us all:

We will not be disappointed in our hope, for, in Christ, God loves us so deeply that the Savior *died* for us while we were still sinners. If, then, we were justified by that *death—or* that blood—of Christ, much more shall we be saved from any future outpouring of God's wrath.¹⁴

If God justifies and reconciles to himself enemies, he will *certainly* save friends.¹⁵

Mediators are frequently referred to in other Scriptures. The apostle Paul notes that Moses was a mediator in delivering the Law (Gal 3:19-20; cf. Ex 32:30-32; Num 12:6-8). Job, in his response to Bildad, longs for a mediator who could arbitrate (Job 9:33). An

alienated father and son, David and Absalom, were reconciled (temporarily) through the mediation of Joab (2 Sam 14:1-23). It is reasonable to see the prophets role in mediatorial terms: they were standing between humans and God (Deut18:18-23). Then, of course, there is the intermediary function of the Old Testament priest, who bridged the God-human relationship (Ex 28:1; Lev9:7; 16:6; cf. Heb 5:1-4).

Summary

Because of a concern for maintaining community and family solidarity, many cultures of the world prefer indirect methods for handling conflict and potential conflict. One of the more common indirect methods is the use of a mediator. Neither the existence of a mediator nor the functions of a mediator are foreign to the scriptural account. While society may have contaminated the role of mediator or used it for selfish, even evil purposes, it *is* still a legitimate role that needs to be understood and appropriately employed by Christians.