A Game Changer For You

Do You Ever Face Conflict?

Years ago I was driving down Warm Springs Blvd. and a guy in a pickup truck pulled alongside me. I glanced over at him and he stared at me. Then he rolled down his passenger side window and spit onto my driver's side window. I was so glad my window was rolled up. I have no idea what led to that. Did I cut him off? I don't think so. Did I show him disrespect? Certainly not. I had never seen the guy before, so we didn't have a history of conflict. I stared in disbelief at the spittle dripping down my window and the guy drove off. I guess he made his point, whatever it was. Without warning, we can find ourselves in the middle of conflict. A mother and daughter suddenly start arguing. Husbands and wives get into fights. Children get upset with each other on the playground. Co-workers don't like being together and fight over how to run a project. I just recently read of a 17 year old girl who was laughing and joking with her boyfriend and then stabbed her boyfriend and killed him, and no one but them and God know why. Conflict, even in loving, healthy families appears and sometimes it takes a nasty turn. I know of a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law who can't stand being around each other because of their ongoing conflict. Conflict is everywhere and the Bible tells us that it has been around since at least Cain and Abel. There is a well-tested strategy for staying out of conflict and being healthy psychologically and spiritually and it comes straight from the Bible. It has been a game changer for others, and it can be for you and those you love. Here is how Jesus Himself dealt with conflict. Our Big Idea is this. Shine the light whenever you find yourself in conflict.

The Bible tells us that Jesus was dragged into a conflict while He was teaching some followers. A group of religious leaders dragged a woman to Him that had been caught in the middle of committing adultery. This is described in John 8. Some Bibles note that this account was not found in the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of John, but I think it clearly was a historical account that was added later when it was discovered. The Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to make a determination of what to do with her since Jewish law required she be executed for her sin, but Roman law prohibited the Jewish leaders from executing anyone. They were trying to trap Jesus, but the Lord used this hateful attempt on their part to teach the world something about conflict. Many scholars believe that the woman's husband set her up. He knew she was cheating on him and so he let the Jewish authorities know where they could catch her. The husband would have known what the Jews would do with her and so out of anger, he gave them the details of her location and what she was doing. Perhaps the most anger and conflict in the world is not what takes place between countries but in homes within families. Jesus did something that is widely discussed but no one really knows what His intention was. **But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.** (John 8: 6b NIV) What did He write? Was it the sins committed by the men there? Was it a list of those who also had committed adultery? We don't know. Maybe it was just scribbling as each one examined His own heart. He told them that the one who was sinless was the only one to throw the first stone to begin the adulterous woman's execution. Then Jesus kept writing in the dirt and slowly all the men slipped away.

Finally, after Jesus asked the woman if anyone was left to condemn her and she told Him there wasn't, Jesus sent her away with divine forgiveness. **"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."** (John 8: 11b NIV) Nearly all conflict is the result of one or both parties feeling they have been wronged. Now it may begin as an argument about how to do something or it could be fueled by greed or selfish desires, but it almost always is due to the belief that "I've been mistreated, I have been disrespected, my rights have been trampled upon." There is only one way for conflict to be ended on your part that is healthy and that is how Jesus did it. You forgive the other person. I am surprised and astounded by the placement of this text of Jesus forgiving the woman. Immediately after the account, and without any seeming connection between the text and what He says next, Jesus makes a definitive statement about what sort of life is best for you. **When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life** (John 8: 12 NIV) In other words, if you follow Jesus, you will always know what to do next, how to respond to what you face because you can see due to being in the light. That is a tremendous promise for you. What had Jesus just done before saying this that you and I could follow? He forgave the woman caught in adultery.

Many see forgiveness as giving in, as giving up the fight, of letting go of their cause that is so crucial to them. Forgiveness is nothing of the sort. It is leaving whatever issue you have in God's hands and believing in Him to work out everything. Forgiveness is the decision that it is not your fight, whatever grievance you have or conflict facing you. But more than that, forgiveness is finding your way in a very dark world. Remember Jesus' response to being

brutalized on the Cross? **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23: 34b NIV) Not only did Jesus give us the example of how to follow Him, He tells us how walking in the light is practiced. Peter the disciple asked a good question. **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?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.** (Matthew 18: 21-22 NIV) There is not a limit to how many times to forgive. It takes great faith in God to do this but it can be done and must be done if you are to break free of conflict and walk in the light. If you want your relationship with God to be right then you must forgive those who wrong you. He tells us that when we pray, forgiving others must be a part of it. **Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.** (Matthew 6: 12 NIV) It is impossible to have a right relationship with Jesus if you are not forgiving those with whom you are in conflict. You have no power of God working in you and guiding you. You are in effect, walking in the dark. Paul summarized perfectly Jesus' take on forgiveness. **Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** (Colossians 3: 13 NIV)

Imagine a flashlight as forgiveness. When you forgive, you can see clearly and make sense of things. If you don't forgive, you can't see anything. You are fumbling about in the dark. You suffer when you don't forgive. Your friendships suffer. Your marriage and your relationships with your kids suffer. And your life with God suffers. Usually it is pride that keeps you from forgiving others. You don't want to be the one who gives in or is used. You don't want to be walked on, you don't want to be mistreated. Pride has destroyed billions of lives, millions of marriages and perhaps even more friendships. What wreckage did Cain's pride cause him! Cain had a grievance against his brother and as silly as it looks to you and I it was very real to him. What if Cain had simply forgiven Abel? Cain could have lived a tremendous life and had his brother as his lifelong friend and perhaps together they could have solved many of the problems sin caused everyone. Take a flashlight and keep it somewhere that is visible to you. Use it to remind you that forgiveness is how you stay in the light and how you are able to see. Our big idea. Shine the light whenever you find yourself in conflict. That means, if you want to see clearly and know what to do, start with forgiveness. Isn't it better for you to be in a family that practices forgiveness? Wouldn't it be good to work with people who forgive? Churches thrive spiritually when forgiveness is the way of life and practiced every time there is conflict. Shine that flashlight all about. Forgive.