

## Lesson 10: Times of Little Trouble

Our lesson this week deals with what the writer calls, "Times of little Trouble."

Trouble is something that plagues our society and even the best of homes will face times of struggle, times of conflict. It's just one of the facts of life in a fallen world. Simple things, such as whose turn it is to take out the trash, whether your teenage daughter finished her homework, whether your son has done his chores, are bothersome but relatively minor issues that can, generally, be resolved with minimal disruption. But other issues can breach and threaten the harmony of the family.

What comes to mind when you think of trouble?

There are several meanings that could be given to the word "trouble" however the lesson is dealing with it from the standpoint of conflict.

### **Conflict, what is conflict?**

Conflict is a normal and natural aspect of relationships. As human beings, we are primed to respond to stress with a "fight" or "flight" response. Often, neither of these choices is appropriate. Therefore, we need to find a way to address conflict that is direct and assertive, while also being respectful and diplomatic. Some people fear conflict and go to great lengths to avoid it, which can backfire and lead to emotional, relational and medical problems. But if handled effectively, conflict can be an opportunity for learning, growth and positive change. One of the reasons that conflict arises in a family because it is constantly evolving, members see things differently. William James says, whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude."

### ***Where did Conflict begin?***

In the first book of the Bible we find the first instance of conflict, Gen. 13:7, strife between Abraham's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. Further to this, all through the Old Testament we see that Israel was constantly in conflict with God. In the New Testament Paul speaking to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:24) admonished him to avoid quarrel and be kind one to another.

The writer of Proverbs makes a very astute observation: "The start of an argument is like a water leak, so stop it before real trouble breaks out" (Prov. 17:14, CEV). Once begun, a conflict can become incredibly hard to shut down. According to Romans 14:19, we can prevent conflict by following after two things: that which makes for peace and that with which one may edify another. How much more so are these principles crucial to harmony in the family?

### **Can you think of some suggestions for conflict resolution?**

Someone has made the following suggestions for conflict resolution:

1. Pause and get grounded.

If your feathers are ruffled, it's best to take a moment to regroup before having a knee-jerk reaction you might regret later. Check in with your body and recognize if there are any physical discomforts that are exacerbating your emotional agitation (i.e., hunger, fatigue, etc.).

2. Zoom out to gain perspective. Imagine you are viewing the conflict from a neutral place at a greater distance, and Imagine emotionally unplugging or detaching from the situation to increase

awareness. Identify the real issue and don't major in minors if there is a deeper core issue that needs to be addressed. For example, don't argue about the toilet seat being left up if you are actually mad that you are feeling lonely or unsupported. Choose your battles: let the little stuff go and care about yourself enough to address the important matters.

3. Become mindful of your nonverbal communication.

Because much of communication is nonverbal, be aware of your facial expressions, hand gestures, and body language to ensure you are sending the message that you want to be received.

4. Avoid behaviors that add fuel to the fire.

Physical or verbal abuse is never acceptable. Dr. John Gottman, a leading researcher and expert on relationships, identified four additional behaviors that should be avoided during conflict: criticism (attacking the person's character); contempt (insults and nonverbal hostility, like eye rolling); stonewalling (shutting down); and defensiveness (seeing self as victim.)

5. Reflect empathy.

The ability to show you understand how the other person feels is perhaps the single most powerful communication skill. It allows the person to feel heard and diffuses conflict. You do not have to agree with their perspective, but you can show you understand their feelings (i.e., "I can understand that you felt upset by that.").

6. Take responsibility for yourself.

Save everybody time by owning up to your own poor behaviors. This is not a sign of weakness, rather it demonstrates awareness and integrity and will likely expedite successful resolution. Make sincere and timely amends and apologies.

7. Use assertive communication.

Avoid being passive (weak in setting boundaries); aggressive (hostile); or passive-aggressive (acting out through indirect behaviors like slamming a door). Stay in the present and don't dredge up old issues from the past. Ask for what you need, say no to what you can't do, and be open to negotiation and compromise. Articulate a complaint about a specific behavior and express your feelings in a way that is clear, direct and appropriate. Use "I" statements rather than "you" statements to reduce defensiveness. For example, "I am upset that I did not get the promotion," rather than "You are a jackass."

8. Be open and flexible.

Listen and really hear the other person. Ask questions to gather information that will be clarifying. Consider other perspectives or solutions. Look for the compromise or "win-win."

9. Focus on what you can control and let go of the rest.

Author Wayne Dyer wisely said, "How people treat you is their karma; how you react is yours." You can control your own behaviors and responses but you cannot control others or the outcome.

### **How about Conflict in Marriage?**

**Marriage** is the second institution God made, it is not good for the man to be alone Gen 2:18. Marriage is the union between a man and a woman, instituted and ordained by **God** as the lifelong relationship between one man as husband, and one woman as wife. The Apostle Paul gave a similar directive when he wrote, "Let marriage be held in honor among all" but our modern society has deviated a long way from the spiritual ideal that God intended. Till death do us part has become till fault do us find. If we were to approach marriage from the spiritual rather than the metaphysical then there would be less occasion for conflict and divorce.

Marriage is the organ for the perpetuation of the spiritual life. The spiritual life is a feeble flame that needs to be continuously replenished, and the vehicles for it, men and women, have a very frail and brief existence. When we get married we undertake to fulfill our share of the task for humanity. But the task is not only to perpetuate the spiritual life, but to enhance it – that is, to extend the region of the spirit on earth, to heighten its quality, to produce in human relations an image of the Kingdom of Heaven. The formula of the spiritual relation is: Act in a way that elicits the best in others, in the process eliciting the best of your potential.

Field Marshall Montgomery once told his troops, 'Gentlemen, don't even think about marriage until you have mastered the art of warfare.' Conflict is an inevitable aspect of marriage as we go through the process of bonding.

### **How do we achieve this spiritual ideal?**

Sometimes we enter into marriage as one going into a fool's paradise only to end up in trouble. A woman may recognize that there are qualities in a man which is quite unacceptable to her, but she nevertheless marries him with the ridiculous notion that she can change him, so with a supercilious grin on her face she exclaims "I will alter him, I will alter him." Not only does she want to change him but she also has the foolish idea that she will be the same forever.

*Quite often* couples remark that they have been married for x number of years and never had a quarrel. Now, tell me, is that possible? No. it could be one of three things:

1. somebody is lying
2. one is suffering in silence
3. they don't talk at all; people who interact with others have conflict

Conflict is not a problem; it is the resolution that is the problem. Somebody said, *all marriages are happy; it's the living together afterwards that's the problem.* Conflict may arise because:

- We are disappointed with our partner, our expectations are high. As we enter into marriage we expect everything to be just right for us.
- We expect to eat as we like and remain slim and trim
- We expect a romantic holiday that never materializes

In short, we expect more than the marriage can offer. But unless you feed your marriage it will die. It is far better and cheaper to spend a night away at a hotel than to face the consequences of.....

**One writer says** that couples bring boxes full of presents to be opened, but they also bring other hidden boxes filled with:

- Life's history and Pain
- Emotions and emotional scars,
- Well used patterns of behaviour

These boxes are often tightly sealed and brought into the new home with no intention of opening them, but suddenly some triviality arises and by and by, the tightly sealed lid flies open and out comes strife and commotion.

**Psychologists say** that we all have an 'Inner Advocate' a sort of hidden lawyer which springs to our defense when conflict arises. Most of us believe that we are right and will fight to the bitter end to prove that we are right. Our pride won't let us admit we may be wrong. Part of the reason for conflict is the judgment calls we make. And having made our judgment we expect others to accept them willy nilly.

**Every marriage** will encounter conflicts from time to time but this does not have to threaten the security of the relationship if they are handled constructively. Conflict doesn't mean you suddenly stop being friends. It just means that your relationship needs to step up another gear, you need to move up to a higher plain.

**Competency** in conflict resolution requires two main skills.

1. **Empathy:** Being sensitive in your relationship; having an awareness of the other person's motivations, perceptions and feelings will result in a better atmosphere in which to work.
2. **Logic:** (something women cannot be accused of) the ability to think rationally about alternative solutions and their outcomes and therefore make intelligent choices. (needs open-mindedness)

### **Boundaries:**

One of the most common causes of conflict is the want of respect and/or lack of boundaries. Boundaries define us. A house has boundaries. A boundary shows me where I end and where someone else begins. As well as showing us what we are responsible for, boundaries help us to define what is or is not our responsibility. Boundaries in human relations are not walls; they are unwritten rules of behaviour which govern the way we act with each other. They help us to distinguish our property so that we can take care of it. They also guard our treasures (Matt 7:6) so that no one will steal them. Our greatest property/treasure is our spouse. Every culture and every society has its boundaries and the church is no different. Many of our boundaries come from the Word of God. God has boundaries, and these boundaries affect every sphere of our lives. (Job 14:5)

**Words help** to define our property for others as we communicate our feelings, intentions or dislikes. The most basic boundary-setting word is "NO". It lets others know that you exist apart from them and that you are in control of you. It says that that behaviour is not OK. Within the marriage it is important to have strong boundaries. This is to safeguard yourself, your spouse and others. Strong boundaries means you won't seek to interfere with other persons, nor will you allow them to interfere with you. You may like to flirt, but harmless as it may be, if your spouse

objects, then respect the objection. Your love for each other is paramount, and remember, the fox says, “what's joke to you is death to me”. Sometimes it may be necessary to create temporary boundaries to give your heart the space it needs to be free. In such cases it must be remembered that it is never a permanent way of living.

*Another cause* of conflict in marriage is the lack of self-esteem or self-worth.

### **Self Esteem/Self worth**

Many individuals suffer from low self-esteem or a lack of self-worth. This may be due to poor socialization in childhood; negative messages from family and/or friends; you are ugly, too black; can't you be like.....? Etc. or it could be due to some painful experience. Building self-esteem, whether for your spouse or your child, requires sending positive messages. These could be in the form of praise, compliments, loving and confirming gestures, smile etc.

In general, people with low self-esteem expect to:

- Be cheated on; don't think you are good enough so you expect your mate to look somewhere else.
- Be stepped upon; whatever your mate does is only what you expect
- Expect the worse; they invite it and eventually get it.
- Have feelings of worthlessness
- Blinded by fear
- Feel ugly and sexually unattractive; feeling like a failure as a wife/husband, feeling unloved and unlovable

### **Remedies in conflict:**

1. The Biblical injunction is, Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. (Ephesians 4:26-27)
2. Reduce the flack before you hit the sack.
3. Say you are sorry
4. Use the power of praise and appreciation
5. Don't criticize, actualize
6. Love and appreciate your mate
7. Understand your mate
8. Talk with and to your mate
9. Accept your mate
10. Support your mate
11. Have fun with your mate
12. Worship with your mate
13. Laugh together: it is said that laughter is the fuel in a couple's gas tank. We laugh because we share a humorous view of life; we have interpreted an event or situation in the same way.

### **What is anger?**

### **What is the place of anger in conflict?**

**Anger**, also known as **wrath**, is an intense emotional state. It involves a strong uncomfortable and hostile response to a perceived provocation, hurt or threat. Anger can be a good thing. It can

give you a way to express negative feelings, or motivate you to find solutions to problems. But excessive anger can be problematic.

Anger is often the result of poor social skills. Angry people often come from angry families because they learn from their role models and carry on the same behavior in their own lives, eventually passing it on to their children. At times anger may be the result of unmet needs or due to jealousy, as was Cain's case, which led to the murder of his brother.

Aristotle felt that anger or wrath was a natural outburst of self-defense in situations where people felt they had been wronged. Aquinas (*He was the foremost classical proponent of natural theology and the father of Thomism; of which he argued that reason is found in God.*) felt that if anger was justified, it was not a sin. For example, Matt 5:22 "He that is angry without cause, shall be in danger; but he that is angry with cause, shall not be in danger: for without anger, teaching will be useless, judgments unstable, crimes unchecked. Therefore to be angry is not always an evil."

***What are your thoughts on those statements Above?***

Christians believe in God's anger at the sight of evil. Thus anger is not inconsistent with God's love, as demonstrated in the Gospel where the righteous indignation of Christ is shown in the Cleansing of the Temple. Christians believe that those who reject His revealed Word, condemn themselves, and are condemned by the wrath of God.

Everyone experiences anger, Andrew D. Lester observes, that anger can serve as "a spiritual friend, a spiritual guide, and a spiritual ally." Denying and suppressing anger is contrary to St. Paul's admonition in his Epistle to the Ephesians 4:26-27: be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. You may have a good reason to be angry, but don't remain that way. The wise man says in Ecclesiastes 7:9. Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools, and James 1:19-20 admonishes us "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."

### **Conflict, Abuse, Power, And Control.**

In any conflict situation one or the other will be trying to control. Consequently, the stronger or more powerful will seek to be controlling, this often leads to an abuse of power. And you know the saying, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

**What is power?** I think it's pertinent to place it in a Christian or sociological context.

Power is the capacity of an individual to influence the conduct or behaviour of others. Power can be seen as evil or unjust.

According to French and Raven, power must be distinguished from influence in the following way: power is that state of affairs which holds in a given relationship, A-B, such that a given influence attempt by A over B makes A's desired change in B more likely. It is imperative that every party to a relationship, especially that of marriage, take time to understand the other persons behavior including their mode of communication.

A healthy relationship is one in which both partners feel protected and safe, in which anger is managed in a healthy way, and in which serving one another is the norm. Often victims of abuse feel guilty, as if they were responsible for provoking their abuser or that perhaps they somehow deserve the abuse they receive. Abusers can be quite controlling and often skillful at making their victims feel responsible. The good news is that the Bible offers comfort, not guilt, for the victims of abuse. In some situations, in which the problem gets unmanageable, people should not be afraid to seek outside help.

### **Abusive power and control**

#### ***What is meant by the phrase, abusive power and control?***

It is the way that an abusive person gains and maintains power and control over another person in order to subject that victim to psychological, physical, sexual, or financial abuse.

#### **What are some things that can cause a person to be abusive?**

The motivations of the abuser are varied and can include devaluation, envy, personal gain, personal gratification, psychological projection, or just for the sake of the enjoyment of exercising power and control. Abuse can take a number of forms, physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual, et cetera. But any form of abuse is contrary to the central principle of God's kingdom, unselfish love.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. Colossians 3:19. The word harsh in the original Greek language refers to one's being angry or bitter toward the partner, causing continued pain, intense hostility, and expressions of hatred toward the other. Paul is very clear that a spouse is not to be hostile or violent. Emotional, sexual, and physical abuse is not acceptable behavior for a Christian husband or partner. Instead, what is acceptable is to love your spouse. Paul also makes it clear that love is patient and kind and that love does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, does not keep record of wrongs, does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. 1 Cor. 13

Controlling abusers use tactics to exert power and control over their victims. The tactics themselves are psychologically and sometimes physically abusive. Control may be helped through economic abuse thus limiting the victim's actions as they may then lack the necessary resources to resist the abuse. The goal of the abuser is to control and intimidate the victim or to influence them to feel that they do not have an equal voice in the relationship.

Manipulators and abusers control their victims with a range of tactics, including positive reinforcement (such as praise, superficial charm, flattery, ingratiation, love bombing, smiling, gifts, attention), negative reinforcement, intermittent or partial reinforcement, psychological punishment (such as nagging, silent treatment, swearing, threats, intimidation, emotional blackmail, guilt trips, inattention) and traumatic tactics (such as verbal abuse or explosive anger).

Braiker identified the following ways that manipulators control their victims:

- Positive reinforcement: includes praise, superficial charm, superficial sympathy (crocodile tears), excessive apologizing, money, approval, gifts, attention, facial expressions such as a forced laugh or smile, and public recognition.
- Negative reinforcement: involves removing one from a negative situation as a reward, e.g. "You won't have to do your homework if you allow me to do this to you."
- Intermittent or partial reinforcement: Partial or intermittent negative reinforcement can create an effective climate of fear and doubt. Partial or intermittent positive reinforcement can encourage the victim to persist.
- Punishment: includes nagging, yelling, the silent treatment, intimidation, threats, swearing, emotional blackmail, the guilt trip, sulking, crying, and playing the victim.
- Traumatic one-trial learning: using verbal abuse, explosive anger, or other intimidating behavior to establish dominance or superiority; even one incident of such behavior can condition or train victims to avoid upsetting, confronting or contradicting the manipulator.

Manipulators may have:

- a strong need to attain feelings of power and superiority in relationships with others
- a want and need to feel in control
- a desire to gain a feeling of power over others in order to raise their perception of self-esteem.

The silent treatment is sometimes used as a control mechanism. When so used, it constitutes a passive-aggressive action characterized by the coupling of nonverbal but nonetheless unambiguous indications of the presence of negative emotion with the refusal to discuss the scenario triggering those emotions and, when those emotions' source is unclear to the other party, occasionally the refusal to clarify it or even to identify that source at all. The silent treatment thereby enables its perpetrator to cause hurt, obtain ongoing attention in the form of repeated attempts by the victim to restore dialogue, maintain a position of power through creating uncertainty over how long the verbal silence and associated impossibility of resolution will last, and derive the satisfaction that the perpetrator associates with each of these consequences.

### **Power and control in violent relationships**

Controlling abusers use multiple tactics to exert power and control over their partners. According to Jill Cory and Karen McAndless-Davis, authors of *When Love Hurts: A Woman's Guide to Understanding Abuse in Relationships*: Each of the tactics within the power and control wheel are used to "maintain power and control in the relationship. No matter what tactics your partner uses, the effect is to control and intimidate you or to influence you to feel that you do not have an equal voice in the relationship."

### **Reflecting on the lesson, What do you see as the way forward? Forgiveness!**

#### **Learn to forgive.**

Forgiveness is the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense, let go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, forswears recompense from or punishment of the offender, however legally or morally justified it might be, and with an increased ability to wish the offender well. Forgiveness is different from condoning (failing to see the action as wrong and in need of forgiveness), excusing (not holding



the offender as responsible for the action), forgetting (removing awareness of the offense from consciousness), pardoning (granted for an acknowledged offense by a representative of society, such as a judge), and reconciliation (restoration of a relationship). We should all pray for the spirit of forgiveness. Pray that we will be given the capacity to love and care. In Matthew 7:2 Jesus counsels us to treat others as we want them to treat us.

**How would we like to be treated?** With love, respect, and understanding. Hence the author of Hebrews counsels in, Hebrews 12:14. Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

In fact, forgiveness is an essential part of conflict resolution, especially in the family. When a person sins against us, God's enemy loves to place a wall between us and that person, a roadblock that prevents us from loving that person as Christ loved us. Forgiveness is a choice that we make to get around that roadblock.

Nelson Mandela said, "Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies." Recognize that people come into our lives for a reason and even negative experiences are opportunities for growth. Be grateful for the learning experience, work towards acceptance, forgive and let go of the past. Consciously choose how you want to move forward. Paul writing to the Philippians says, do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. (Phil 2:4-5)