Conflict and the Gospel — Choosing the Path of Reconciliation.

Relevant Scripture

John 3:16, Matthew 16:24-25, Romans 10:9 - The Gospel
Genesis 3:1-7 – The fall
Matthew 5:21-26 – Anger
Matthew 5:38-42 – Retaliation
Matthew 5:43-48 – Love Your Enemies
Matthew 18:15-17 - If a brother sins against you
Ephesians 4:26 – Be Angry and do not sin
James 4:1-4 -The root of conflict
James 4:10 - Humility

Introduction

We are going to talk about Conflict today. We are going to drill down to the root of conflict. What causes it? Why does it get out of control?

Once we understand it, we are going to talk about two different ways we choose to address it– one that leads to more hurt and destruction and the other that leads to personal growth and stronger relationships. In other words, we are going to answer the questions:

1. What causes conflict?
2. How can we choose the outcome?

Think of it as two roads that start at the same point but end up in wildly different places: sinful violence and broken relationships or a better version of us and stronger relationships. Which sounds better to you?

Let's start with the question: What causes conflict?

Can you describe a situation where a small offence grew into a huge fight? Maybe some hurtful words, or worse, physical hurt?

The Root of Conflict

Let's take a look at a video first: Road Rage

This is a funny take on road rage. It illustrates how conflict can get way out of control. Clark's anger at the tailgating truck could have ended up with his family dead. How does a small offense blow up into a major fight with destructive consequences??

Like everything in life, the bible has an answer. turn into James 4:1 *"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. .....*

Essentially, James is telling us that anger is stirred up when we want something and are frustrated getting it, or when we already have it and someone tries to take it away. In either case our desire to get or keep something is at the root of conflict.

What made Clark angry at the beginning of the clip? What was threatened? Safety? Control? Respect? Which is it?

If it was simply safety, he could have slowed down, pulled over and let the truck pass (just like his wife suggested!) He didn't though. He retaliated by passing them and gesturing in a way I decided to edit out of the clip. Why? think he responded because he felt disrespected that is the one word I hear most often when we must deal with conflict at Hope CDA: Disrespect.

What is Disrespect

Definition: People feel disrespected when they perceive a violation of their personal boundaries, values, or perceived social status. We can feel disrespect when we are being ignored, excluded, or treated as unimportant.

Obviously, It's more than safety that's at risk. It's my self-esteem. It's about how other people see me. This is key. What I want others to see in me will be reflected in how I respond to threats. In a way, I worry as much about how other people see me as I do about my safety. My image is as important as my safety.

How you respond to conflict is determined by what your objective is. You can illustrate your response as two paths to choose from:

The Two Paths of Conflict

The Path of the Self (Retaliation)

Hurt (disrespected) → Anger → Retaliation → Escalation → Destruction.
Objective: 'I win, you lose.'
The end point: We both lose, drifting further from God.

The Path of the Gospel (Reconciliation)

Hurt (disrespected) → Anger → Humility → Trust God's Justice → Extend Grace → Reconciliation.
Objective: 'We both win in Christ.'
The end point: We grow more Christlike, and God is glorified.

Which road are you most tempted to take: retaliation or reconciliation?

Our Response to Anger

It's okay to get angry – It's not okay to sin in response to anger. (Ephesians 4:26)

When we choose the road of retaliation, we are focused on preserving our status and our power. We focus on what you want. **You are focused on you.**

When we choose the road of reconciliation, we focus on trusting God, his justice and restoring the relationship with the other person**. You are focused on God and the other person. It requires humility.** (James 4:10)

Choosing Humility is Not Easy

Choosing humility means choosing NOT to put myself first. That is hard. Once sin entered the world, we became prone to put ourselves at the center of the universe.

In the opening chapters of the bible, Adam and Even were in perfect relationship with God and each other. But then Satan deceived them. Remember from Genesis, "Did God really say……?" Satan put doubt in their hearts, and they ran with it. Their act of disobedience in the garden is at the root of our self-centeredness today.

So, given it's in our nature to be self-centered and prideful, how do we find the humility to put ourselves aside and to consider others first? Even more importantly, how do we retore our relationship with God? It's not through anything we can do. It's only through God himself that we are able to take the path toward reconciliation.

The Gospel in a Nutshell – How God made the choice possible

God and only God provides a way back to him and back to who we were designed to be. He offers it as a free gift, out of his gracious love. But it is a gift we must choose to accept. Looking back to our two paths, this is really the first decision you need to make. Have you accepted God's gift of salvation by considering and placing your faith in Christ? That's something you need to consider before you can experience the real humility it takes to travel the path of reconciliation in conflict. If you need help with that, if you want to find out more, talk to Rob, or to me or to your coach.

Practically Speaking

Accepting Christ doesn't instantly make us less selfish. It is only the beginning. In enables us to start the process of becoming less selfish and more like Christ. So, you'll need some guidance and help as you pursue the path of reconciliation in conflict through Christ.

Learning from Jesus: If your Brother Sins Against You.

We can again turn to the bible for some practical wisdom in how to deal with conflict. He talks a lot about anger, resentment and retaliation in Matthew Jesus summarizes it in Matthew 5, in a section called the Sermon on the Mount. We don't have time to cover that here, but I really encourage you to spend some time mediating on those passages. They help set the stage for the steps that Jesus lays out later in Chapter 18:

If Your Brother Sins Against You

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

What this means for us practically:

Step 1: PRAY! Is it really something that you need to bring up? Can you let it go?

Step 2: PRAY! If you can't just let it go, go to the person first, by yourself. DON'T go to others complaining about the situation to build an army to win a battle. Remember the goal isn't to win. The goal is to reconcile and grow in Christ.

Step 3. PRAY! Own your part first. Think about what YOU may have done to contribute to the problem. Jesus tells us to take the LOG out of our eye before we point out the speck in someone else. It's amazing how quickly we can work through conflict when we own our part first.

Step 4: PRAY! If you can't resolve the conflict between the two of you, THEN you reach out for help. Again, you don't spread gossip and enlist an army. You find someone that both of you trust to help you see things more clearly. This could be another participant, the house captain, a foreman, myself, LaVonne or Rob.

Helping Others In Conflict – Reinforce the teaching of Jesus!

How can you help when you are a person on the outside of the conflict? Essentially, point them back to God's word, and the steps we outlined.

- If they approach you about a problem with someone else in the program, stop them. Ask them if they have gone to the person first. DON"T ENGAGE IN GOSSIP

Why is gossip so tempting when we feel disrespected or wronged? What damage does it do to relationships and community?

- Don't take sides. Remember, it's not about who wins or loses. It's about helping your brothers grow in Christ and reconcile to each other.
- If the conflict is heated, if there are harsh words or threats, DE-ESCALATE first. Highly emotional people can't think straight. Get another participant to help. Separate the men and give them a chance to vent a bit. This is not the time to preach or to try and solve the problem. It's the time to listen and help them get back in control.
- THEN, consider how to bring them back together. You may need to wait to get help from a staff person.

Final Summary

• Most conflict begins with disrespect — often expressed through gossip.
• The world's road: retaliation — 'I win, you lose.' But in the end, we both lose.
• The gospel's road: reconciliation — 'We both win in Christ.' We grow in humility and glorify God.
• The cross is the final word: Christ's sacrifice reconciled us to God and frees us to walk humbly in forgiveness with others.
• Without the cross → conflict ends in destruction.
• With the cross → conflict becomes redemptive reconstruction, to the glory of God.

Vision for Our Community

What would it look like if our recovery community approached every conflict through the lens of the gospel? Instead of retaliation and division, we would see humility, forgiveness, and reconciliation shaping our relationships. Our community would shine as a living picture of God's grace — a place where broken men are rebuilt into brothers who glorify Christ together.

Additional Discussion Questions

- How does remembering Christ's sacrifice at the cross make humility possible in conflict?
- How does following Matthew 18 protect us from gossip?
- What would it look like for your response to conflict to glorify God and show His grace to others?