A PROCESS FOR WORKING AT INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Facing a Conflict: Preparation

1. **Be honest with yourself – admit the conflict** Sometimes we can want to deny that a relationship has deteriorated. The first step to restoration is admitting to ourselves that something is wrong. **Matthew 5:23-24**… if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you…

2. **Listen to yourself – examine your own heart** Take time to listen to yourself, to explore and acknowledge your own feelings and what's behind them. Be able to name what your concerns are. It may help to write a letter explaining your concerns. It may not be appropriate to share the letter with the other person, but this can help you focus and sort out your thoughts. What else is happening in each of your lives that may be affecting and playing into your relationship? **Psalm 139:1-5, 19-24** Lord you have searched me and you know me…

3. **Consider how to approach the other gently** See how you can name what really matters in a way that reduces blame, and owns up to your own fallibility and unhelpful contributions to the situation. Think of things you can affirm in the other person. **Proverbs 15:1** A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

4. **Break the negative cycle – name the conflict** Sometimes asking "What's happening between us?" can begin to shift the dynamic with the other person, and help each of you to reflect more on your contribution to what's going on. Check out whether the other perceives any difficulties. Take some time alone if needed, and then plan together when the two of you are able to meet to work through the tensions. **Matthew 5:23-24**… go… be reconciled to your brother or sister…

5. **Be explicit: tell the other that you have some concerns to talk about** The other person may need time before they are ready to talk. Find a time when you will both be ready to talk – and to listen.

6. **Agree how you will work together** Share this handout and see if you can agree that the following process presents a helpful way to try to move forward.

When you Meet 'the Other'

1. **Try to relax** (OK – so this is going to be hard). Pray about the situation, breathe deeply, and sense God's love as you come to face the person.

2. **Affirm the relationship** Explain your motivation (if genuine) to work through the tensions because you care about the relationship. Show your care by affirming what you appreciate about the other person, including perhaps some positive past memories, and your future hopes for the relationship.

3. **Share your stories and perspectives** Share about events that bear on the conflict. Name concerns. Be specific. Listen to each other – and remember that one way to demonstrate listening is to summarise what the other has said.

4. **Identify together the issues creating tension** Outline together a joint list of the issues which you want address.

5. **Note common ground and move towards hurts** Take time to affirm the relationship, and each other. Note what you hold in common on a particular issue. If there are hurts, identify the feelings and see if the roots of these can be brought to light. You might take a break if intense feelings overwhelm one of you.

6. **Work together on one issue at a time** Although issues can be inter-connected, you need to find a way to make the discussion manageable. Clarify what the issue is (i.e. the subject or topic) and what each person's interests (i.e. key underlying concerns and needs) are on the one issue.

7. **Explore options to work at the relationship and to address concerns** Discuss what would help the relationship or situation in the future. Generate lots of options (even crazy ones) to address each other's concerns. Don't jump to agreement yet. Be prepared to make requests – and to make offers.

8. **Work out a clear plan** Consider the pros and cons of different options. Several ideas combined together may satisfy both of you on a particular issue. Don't be afraid to refine or combine the best ideas until they are acceptable to both. Get specific about who will do what and when. Write out your plan.

9. **Give an apology where appropriate** Admit ways in which you have contributed to the difficulties. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. (James 5:16)

10. **Follow up.** Discuss ways to learn from the conflict – and

to let go of it. Be gracious to one another. Follow up the discussion with a note of care, a meal, or some small act of kindness. Check on how implementation of the plan is going.

If the Discussion Gets Really Difficult

1. **Stay grounded** Remember that both of you are worthy of love and respect.
2. **Don't take it too personally** Protect yourself by shielding your core from attack, by deciding which things to accept as beneficial to consider, and reject what is harmful. Know that people generally attack others out of fear and insecurity.
3. **Self-differentiate** Speak clearly for yourself, not in reaction to the other.
4. **Listen transformatively** When people feel really listened to, they can let their guard down.
5. **Admit fault** Model that it is okay to admit you acted or spoke unhelpfully. Own your share of the difficulties.
6. **Remember that the other may need more time** Name the importance of the relationship and issues; then agree whether it might be more helpful to postpone your meeting until a later time when you have both thought it through more. Giving one another time can sometimes be the most gracious action on both sides.

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