

INTERPERSONAL RELATING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Loving and Relating Well

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

“And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’” Luke 10:27

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” Romans 12:18

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” John 15:11-17

“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Colossians 3:14

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a result of the readings, discussion and activities in this lesson, the candidate should be able to ...

- Understand the realities of living overseas with colleagues and co-workers
- Identify areas of potential conflict
- Hear the call to love one another
- Develop skills necessary to deal with and resolve conflict

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this lesson is to provide a realistic picture of the cause for broken relationships and possible principles and skills necessary to restore and maintain love and respect for each other. The question is not if conflict happens but when it happens. The rub of personalities, preferences, and competing agendas is part of life that must be acknowledged and handled in a constructive and loving manner. Without awareness and skill, relationships become difficult and our witness is harmed.

CASE STUDY: TROUBLES IN THAILAND

After years of preparation and anticipation, Alyssa and Mike arrive in Chiang Mai, Thailand to begin their assignment as cross-cultural workers. They have studied the Buddhist religion of Thailand, taken specialized courses in language acquisition, and worked hard to have a vibrant and healthy marriage. They feel they are ready to tackle anything that might come their way. Their sense of call to the Thai people is strong, and they are ready to get to work.

Alyssa and Mike join an established team of five people, two couples, and a single lady. Sam and Susan are originally from California, where he served as a pastor of a rural congregation. Gary and Gina are from Georgia. Before coming to Thailand, both worked as social workers at an inner city, drug abuse rehabilitation center. The newest member of the team is Carol, who was a schoolteacher in Michigan before coming to Thailand.

*EARLY THE SECOND WEEK, THE SCENE
OF WARMTH, LOVE, AND UNITY
BEGINS TO CHANGE.*

The whole team is at the airport to greet Alyssa and Mike when they arrive. The scene in the arrival hall is warm and cordial, as the team members greet and hug Alyssa and Mike. There seems to be genuine excitement to have the new couple in Thailand and as part of the team.

Everyone is smiling, and laughter fills the hall. Alyssa thinks to herself, "What a wonderful group of people. While we have left behind family and friends, we have gained a new family."

During their first week in Thailand, everyone is helpful as Alyssa and Mike begin settling into their new life. Gary and Gina take them on a walking tour of the city. Sam and Susan spend the better part of an afternoon guiding Alyssa and Mike through the market, introducing them to vendors selling fruits, vegetables, and meats. Carol takes Alyssa for afternoon tea with her language teacher.

At the end of the week, Mike wryly comments to Alyssa, "Not only do these people love each other, but it looks as though they actually like each other. I am so glad that everyone is on the same page and working together."

Early the second week, the scene of warmth, love, and unity begins to change. On Tuesday, Mike rides with Sam to a training conference for rural church planters. On the four-hour drive to the conference site, Sam tells story after story of churches being planted and how the training is absolutely necessary for the success of the church planters. At several points in these stories, Sam throws in a couple of disparaging remarks about Gary and Gina's work

among drug users in the city. As they pull up to the village church where the training is to occur, Sam turns to Mike and says, “You and I know church planting is the most important work here. I hope you and Alyssa will stand with me and these church planters when we make decisions about budget next month. The money going to those druggies could be better used to plant churches.”

While Mike is at the rural church planting conference, Alyssa spends the morning visiting the rehab center in Chiang Mai. Gina takes Alyssa from room to room of the center, introducing her to staff members and explaining what they do. Alyssa hears moving stories about how men and women addicted to drugs have come to faith in Christ and have been delivered from their addiction. As they sit down to have lunch at a small café next to the center, Gina leans across the table and says to Alyssa, “You can see how life-changing this work is. I hope you and Mike will stand with these dear Thai people and my staff when we make decisions about budget next month. If too much funding goes to salaries for church planters and to hold more conferences, the center will have to reduce staff and cut back services.”

I HATE TEAM MEETINGS, BECAUSE ALL WE DO IS ACCUSE AND FIGHT.

At dinner that evening, Mike and Alyssa agree to compare notes from the day. Alyssa listens as Mike tells her stories of the church planting success, the conference, and the need for more money for church planters. He repeats Sam’s request for their support for more budget funds for church planters and not diverting these important resources to the rehab center. Once Mike is done, Alyssa does not respond but sits in silence. He finally asks, “Alyssa, what is wrong?” “Mike, I think there is a problem here.”

Over the days and weeks ahead, more and more signs of conflict emerge. Unkind remarks, characterizations, and accusations are made against Gary and Gina by Sam and Susan, and the same is made in return by Gary and Gina against Sam and Susan. Alyssa and Mike’s first impression of team love and unity is slowly coming unraveled. Because Carol is the silent voice in the back and forth between the couples, they decide to get her perspective.

Over dinner, Carol slowly unpacks the growing tension between the two couples. She tells how disagreements in priorities and styles of ministry first produced misunderstandings, then conflict, and eventually conflict grew into open hostility. “This has been going on for years. They tried to work together but misread the intentions of the other. Misunderstandings turned into hurt feelings, and now they do not talk to each other at all. They can be civil and put on a good show when the occasion requires, but they are at war with each other. When they do speak, it is usually in anger and spite.” Carol starts crying. “I hate team meetings, because all we do is accuse and fight. And usually, I am caught in the middle.” She pauses. “These are not bad people. Believe it or not, there was a time when we had regular dinners together, laughed a lot, and cared for and supported each other. At one time, we loved each other. It is like a terrible demon entered into our team and made everything bad, really bad.” Carol sits looking down at her trembling hands. Alyssa and Mike are silent as well. After a long pause, Carol continues, “The real tragedy is that the Thais know there is tension and hear the conflict. And they are being asked to take sides.”

The day that Alyssa and Mike have been dreading finally arrives. The whole team gathers at a hotel conference room for their annual meeting to set objectives and allocate money for the

budget. Sam and Susan sit on one side of a long conference table and Gary and Gina are on the other. Alyssa and Mike are at one end of the table and Carol is at the other.

After a short devotion and prayer by Carol, polite discussion begins with Sam giving his report about church planting efforts followed by Gina's report on the rehab center's successes. Alyssa and Mike report how they have begun language study and their hopes for future ministry. Carol states that she has reached her competency level in the Thai language and is praying about where she might plug into the ongoing ministries. As the discussion turns from

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reports to setting objectives and funding ministries, the volume and intensity of Sam's voice increases. Gina matches Sam's volume and intensity. In the midst of Gina's passionate plea for the team to support the work of the center, Sam interrupts her and makes a retort. Gary suddenly stands up and starts pointing at Sam.

"Let Gina finish what she is saying. Why can't we have a discussion about these matters without you acting like a bully? You are just repeating what you always say and not listening to Gina. All you want is to make sure to have your way again this year!" Sam gets to his feet and begins jabbing his fist in Gary's direction. "Why don't you just say you are against evangelism and starting churches?" Even louder and with equal jabbing, Gary yells, "Why can't you admit that you don't care for people and their real problems? You idiot!" Spent and red-faced, Gary grabs his papers and storms out of the room. Susan glares at Gina with her arms across her chest. She explodes, "Well! That is just like Gary! If he can't have his way, he just leaves. I think we would all be better off if you both left. If you both left Thailand and go back to your people in Georgia."

From the end of the table, Alyssa and Mike sit dumbfounded. Sam looks directly at Mike. "Well, Mike, say something. Surely, you and Alyssa see what is at stake here. Tell Gina where you stand."

From the other end of the table, Carol softly sobs.

REFLECT #1

1. What relational issues can you identify in the story?
2. Who is at fault for the breakdown of the relationship?
3. Who is right and who is wrong?
4. What could have been done to prevent the conflict getting this far?

The problems in Thailand are not just confined to Thailand but happen all too frequently among cross-cultural workers across the world. The chief problem in mission work is not a lack of strategy, absence of funding, or opposition from non-Christians. Instead, the chief hindrance to the expansion of the gospel is our inability to love and relate to each other. Above our call to any particular ministry or agenda, we are called to love.

CALLED TO LOVE

The effectiveness of our witness in a cross-cultural setting will be impacted by our ability or

inability to love those closest to us. Why? Loving relationships are a crucial part of our witness and service in the following ways:

- The conduit through which the gospel passes from us to another person is most often through our relationships. If we relate and love well, the gospel is communicated.
- The demands of serving cross-culturally in often isolated places are extremely high. Having a strong, well-maintained network of supportive relationships in the new culture provides an essential resource for our personal and family survival.
- Cross-cultural service is often done in groups or teams. Good relational functioning is crucial to success on a team.
- The visible example of care, love, and respect for our colleagues and team members speaks much louder than our words.
- Jesus commands us to love one another.

Scripture speaks about the need and necessity of love almost more than anything else. Love is central to the teachings, life, and commandments of Jesus and a central theme in the Gospels. John tells us that

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). Just as God loves us, we are to love one another.

REFLECT #2

It is important that any discussion on how we relate to one another is grounded in the words of Jesus. His words should be our foundation. Read John 15:9-17 and write a response to the following questions:

1. What is Jesus' command?
2. What does Jesus mean when he says “remain in my love” (vs. 9)?
3. What is the connection between commandments, fruit, and love?

Loving others, in theory, is one thing, but loving them in real life is definitely another. What does love look like? The pressures of agendas, the presence of strong personalities, and the pressures of cross-cultural living demand that we examine and define how love looks and acts. Unless we understand and commit ourselves to real, tangible acts of love, loving one another remains an unrealized ideal.

Below are ways in which love acts ...

Love Makes Friends

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

Another word for love is friendship. Friendship is based on respect and mutuality. If I love someone, I will strive to treat them as a person created in the image of God, worthy of dignity and respect. Love means that I walk alongside another human being seeking their welfare. Love without friendship can turn into pity or an unhealthy co-dependency. Jesus loves us and calls us friends.

Love Treasures Differences

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Rom. 13:9-10; see also Matt. 19:19)

Other-love is radically different than self-love, because love becomes the act of loving in spite of differences. If we only love those who think like us, look like us, or act the way we act, then is this really love? Love treasures the differences of the neighbor who comes from another social-cultural background, holds divergent opinions, and lives according to other commitments. When differences exist, love is bold and active. Thus, love is not merely a way of tolerating the differences of others, but love is a way of treasuring our neighbor's differences.

Love Casts out all Fears

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:18-19)

If we fear, we will not love. The opposite of love could be my acts to maintain control of my situation and control of others. If for some reason we fear this kind of loss, it could be that we are not free to love. Too many times, fear of losing control of what we think is important (morality, doctrine, strategy, money) causes us to lose what God says is the most important, love. Ultimately, it is only as we know and experience God's love that we are freed from these less important items in order to love people.

Love Lays Down Life

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:16, 18)

Christ is the supreme example of what love does. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Love gives, expends, suffers, and dies.

Thus, love is more than a good feeling, a nice thought, occasional kind words, or toleration of another's mistakes. Love lays down life. We may say we love someone, but have we suffered with them, endured misunderstandings on their behalf, expended sleepless nights, and are we willing to die for them? The cruciform life (a life conformed to the suffering and dying of Christ) is the life that loves.

Some say that this kind of love asks too much. They protest that we are not Christ and thus should not be expected to love in this way. They might say, "We have rights that must be protected, and we are not meant to be a doormat for other people." Yet, the call to love is more than an unrealized or idealized concept; but our call, according to John, Paul, and Christ, we are to love.

REFLECT #3

1. In I Corinthians 13:1-13, Paul describes love as 'the more excellent way.' He gives us a vivid picture of how love looks and acts. Read these verses aloud and then list below at least five ways in which love acts.
2. How would Paul's words concerning love change the relationship between the two couples in the Thailand?

LOVE LAYS THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

"The fruit of the Spirit is love..." (Gal. 5:22). Yes, loving is hard. This is especially true of those who are nearest to us. And yes, we cannot love in our own power. The kind of love that is patient, kind, does not envy, is not self-seeking, not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs suffered, does not delight in evil, always hopes, and always perseveres is only the result of the

Spirit's indwelling power. Without God's Spirit, we will seek to serve our own agendas, be easily wounded, want what others have, speak ill of others, gossip, and slander. Our call to love must be coupled with God, who is love, so that true love is made manifest in our words and acts.

WHEN CONFLICT HAPPENS

Since the day Eve chose to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, conflict between people has been a human reality. In the Genesis story, we see the disruption of relationship that occurs between mankind and God – but also, we see the first conflict between Adam and Eve as Adam passes the blame for his sinful actions to Eve. The relationship that had originally been characterized by shameless nakedness became one of accusation and blame. In the next generation, conflict takes on its ugliest form as Cain's unresolved anger causes him to take the life of his brother. While God created us to live with him and with others in relational harmony, as we exercise our will, conflict can result. Even in the most harmonious relationships, it is not a matter of "whether" conflict will occur, it is more a matter of "when" conflict will occur and, more importantly, how to resolve it so that we can live in harmony with one another and with God.

*WE MUST DESIRE TO RESOLVE
CONFLICT IN ORDER FOR IT TO BE
RESOLVED.*

While there are many factors that contribute to the harmony of relationships, none is more important than our attitude. We must desire to resolve conflict in order for it to be resolved. If we do not desire resolution, we will allow Satan to take a foothold in our heart and mind. The Apostle Paul reminds the people of God in Ephesians 4:26, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold." Unresolved conflict creates a bitter root within the heart of those who choose to hold onto bitterness, anger, and jealousy. If the bitter root is not addressed, the health of one's mind, spirit and body suffers. The bitter root grows into a wedge that creates division in relationship with God and others. A famous folk proverb states, "A stitch in time saves nine." In other words, addressing an issue early can prevent a large tear. Regularly assessing the health of our attitudes and communication can serve to prevent tears in relationships.

One of the most crucial issues for a team of missionaries is this willingness to address conflict and to determine how the team will work toward resolving it. If everyone on the team is passionate about their call or their ministry but cannot proactively deal with conflict, the team will struggle with unity and cohesiveness. You may reach a point as a team where you actually work against one other rather than with each other. This will have a significant impact on the work you are called to do. For a team to be healthy and growing, it must have enough flexibility to deal with the give and take of conflict and have a heart that leans towards settling the relationships between one another. Ephesians 5:21 advises believers to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." The answer to resolving conflict among believers is not usually found on one side or the other – but is somewhere in between.

WHEN MORE THAN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS: SEEKING A GODLY ATTITUDE

God is the Creator of relationships. He possesses the perfect qualities and characteristics that lead to healthy relating. In Exodus 34:5-7, God describes himself to Moses this way: "Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, The LORD, The LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished." Since our goal is to live and love like God we should relate to others in the same way. Our demeanor should be one of compassion, grace, slowness to anger (patience), love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Additionally, we should be willing to hold others accountable when they continue in behaviors that are counter to the Spirit of Christ and the teachings of the Bible. Humans have many goals in conflict. Unfortunately, the goals that come naturally to us as sinners are goals of revenge, payback, hurting, producing guilt, or winning.

REFLECT #4

Read the following Scriptures and describe the principles you learn about resolving conflict and/or maintaining healthy relationships God's way:

Matthew 5:23-24

Matthew 5:9

Proverbs 15:1

Colossians 3:12-13

Ephesians 4:29-32

Philippians 2:1-11

Romans 12:3-5

James 1:19-20

1. Which of God's self-proclaimed characteristics in Exodus 34:5-7 do you need to pay attention to in your relationship?
2. Think of a person whom you admire because of their ability to maintain healthy relationships. What do you think are some of the reasons they experience success?
3. How do you respond when others hold you accountable for your words, choices, or behaviors?
4. What attitudes do you possess that you would most like for God to change?

SKILLS AND PRINCIPLES FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: COMMUNICATION

The ways we deal with conflict are learned responses. Our family or significant people in our lives have modeled for us the ways we communicate and deal with conflict. Typically, we have done one of two things: we communicate very similarly to the way they did, or we have made the decision to communicate in the exact opposite way because we learned what **not** to do. If you did not learn good communication skills from your family, it serves no purpose to blame them, but rather we should seek biblical principles and proven skills for communicating in a healthy way. Once we become aware of the ways we communicate that are detrimental to our ability to produce peace and progress in relationships, we have a much greater opportunity to address these habits.

Humans accomplish three things through our communication with another person.

First, we try to express what we believe to be true about the situation at hand. It is important to

PANORAMA

keep in mind that you tend to view things from your vantage point. The other person involved is trying to do the same thing from their vantage point.

Secondly, we disclose our thoughts and feelings about the situation. Remember, these are personal and subjective in nature and need to be kept in check as to not cloud the truth about the issue.

Thirdly, we hopefully work at listening as much as we do at communicating our thoughts and ideas. When we fail to offer as much energy and effort to listening as we do to “telling our side of the story,” the conversation cannot move towards understanding and resolution.

People make assumptions about another person’s intent or action based on their own fears and emotions, their own experiences and expectations. As people see the world from their own vantage point, they frequently confuse perception with reality. It is difficult and challenging to attempt to disconnect from our experiences, but we must be open to view a situation from another’s perspective in order to facilitate effective communication.

THREE COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION

- Verbal – words we choose
- Para-verbal – how we say the words
- Non-verbal – body language

Verbal communication is the area that is the easiest for us to utilize. From early on, we learned how to babble and form words to tell people what we wanted or needed from them. We don’t have to tell ourselves to speak when we need to say something; it is a natural response. At times, however, we struggle with the words we choose that communicate how we feel or what we think about something. The words we choose build or burn the connection we have with the person with whom there is conflict. There are many ways to say the same thing. It is important to use our words wisely. Make the words fit the situation at hand, and make them comfortable enough for the hearer to receive it. You may be able to handle strong, confrontive words, but the other person may crumble under those same words. Your words can wound or heal the situation that is creating conflict.

Para-verbal communication is an unconscious form of communication. It refers to how we say something, not what we say. Our voice tone, volume, and rate of speech often convey a message more than the words we choose. One sentence can convey entirely different meanings depending on the emphasis on words and the tone of voice.

Say the following example aloud with the emphasis on the italicized word.

- *I* didn’t tell George you were incompetent.
- I *didn’t* tell George you were incompetent.
- I didn’t *tell* George you were incompetent.
- I didn’t tell *George* you were incompetent.
- I didn’t tell George you were *incompetent*.

Each sentence has a different meaning based on the inflection of the italicized word. Because

our tone tends to change with our mood, it is important that we listen to ourselves as we attempt to communicate with one another. Our inflections and our tones have great communicative power that can be healing or hurtful.

Non-verbal communication occurs when stimuli other than words create meaning in either a sender's or a receiver's mind. Most commonly referred to as body language, it includes body posture, eye rolling, scowling, etc. It may be unintentional, but it is immediate, continuous, and natural. It gives us information regarding status, liking, responsiveness, and relationships. It is particularly appropriate for conveying emotions. Non-verbal messages are often universal and supplement verbal messages. Non-verbal communication accounts for 55% of what is perceived and understood by others. Many times, we are unaware of what our body language is communicating.

Awareness of the three components of communication is necessary on our part if we are to communicate effectively. The more aware we are of what we say, how we say it and how we behave, the better we can navigate through conflict. The responsibility for effective communication lies with the speaker.

REFLECT #5

1. What was fighting or arguing like in your family?
2. How much of how you deal with conflict is similar to what you learned from them?
3. If married, do you deal with conflict with your spouse differently than you do with your friends?
4. What do you like about how you handle conflict?
5. What areas do you need to change?
6. Have you ever been hurt by others' choice of words or how they spoke their words? How did you feel afterward?

SKILLS FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: THE ART OF LISTENING

Learning to communicate what you are thinking and feeling is only one piece of good communication. Equally important is the art of listening. Listening is a complex psychological procedure. It is attending to and perceiving what we hear. Robert Bolton in *People Skills* says, "The goal of listening is to understand the content of the other person's idea or proposals, the meaning it has for him, and the feelings he has about it." There is an element of openness that is needed in order to understand the meaning of what someone is saying. This is difficult to do when you are in conflict. Typically, we switch into defense mode when we are in conflict. We spend more energy defending our case or cause rather than listening to what the other person is saying. Most people believe they listen well; very few actually do.

The most valuable thing you can offer someone is the gift of being heard. When someone feels they are being heard, a tense situation can be transformed into one that is more manageable. It is difficult at times to open our hearts to simply listen.

When feeling attacked or pushed, we typically want to defend ourselves. This is when we must rely upon the Spirit of God to help us work on slowing our reaction time to things that are said to which we do not agree. This is why the Scripture advises us to be "slow to speak." We should allow time in order to understand what is being said and discern the reason behind it. Proverbs 13:3 tells us, "*Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes*

PANORAMA

to ruin.” It is difficult to hold the tongue when we feel the need to defend or clarify, but when we speak rashly, we often create more damage than if we had waited and listened.

To listen actively to someone requires empathy, openness, and awareness. It also requires laying down our own agenda and honestly listening to what the other person is saying. In seeking to understand the situation from the other persons’ point of view and look for the meaning behind what is being said, we gain helpful insight and information that will cast light on the situation. Even if we don’t agree with everything the person is saying, we should try to affirm the feelings they are having as legitimate based on his or her perception of the situation. The goal is to connect or re-connect with the person with whom we are experiencing conflict. At times, this may be a stretch, but by empathizing with others’ “feelings,” we have the potential to de-escalate the tension in the conflict.

One of the ways we prove that we are willing to resolve conflict is by listening. The best way to cue others that you are interested in what they have to say is by paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is not repeating word for word what the other has said. It is attempting to summarize your understanding of the information you have received by using your own words.

Examples of paraphrasing:

- “What I think I hear you saying is...”
- “In other words,...”
- “I gather that...”
- “If I understand correctly what you are saying...”
- “Your main concerns are...”

Paraphrasing can assist in understanding in the following ways:

- Can often de-escalate anger
- Stops miscommunication in the moment
- Helps the listener remember what was said
- Enhances the focus of the listener
- Assists the parties toward specificity

When in conflict, the challenge is to let go of your position for a moment to listen to the other person. This is difficult because there is a need to defend your position. However, when a person decides to listen actively, several things can happen. First, initial clarity about the situation can be gained, which may influence the position you have taken.

Second, you have a better understanding of the issue the other person has with you. Third, by listening and paraphrasing, you help alleviate some of the initial tension that is present. The gift of being heard, especially when in conflict, is oftentimes the thing that begins the healing process for an individual and/or a situation.

REFLECT #6

1. Ask someone who knows you well to describe the body language you typically demonstrate when you are angry or frustrated. How aware are you of what your body language conveys?
2. Ask this person to describe to you a scenario that is causing them conflict or frustration. Practice the art of active listening and paraphrasing as you hear their story.
3. Reflect on a conflict you have experienced in the past with another person. Evaluate your success in the areas of communication and listening. Write below some ideas for how you might have handled it differently.

SKILLS FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: SEEKING HELP FOR HEALING

Preventive care that creates healthy relationships characterized by good communication, mutual submission, servant spiritedness, love, unity, and fruitfulness should be our goal. However, on occasion, passionate people who are living out their missional callings may have very strong differences of opinion. Such was the case with Paul and Barnabas who, due to their disagreement over John Mark, chose to go separate ways for a season. When we examine that story in scripture, many questions come to our minds – Why were they both so stubborn that a compromise could not be achieved? Did they really try? Did God harden their hearts to achieve a greater purpose? Was there not a better way? To be an apostle did not imply perfection. Passionate people who carry the torch of the gospel into dark places by nature possess courage, creativity, ingenuity, and a bit of independence (often to a fault). While it appears that God used each of these early missionaries in unique ways, the way of division is not the message of Christ who in John 17 prays that his followers will be brought into “complete unity to let the world know that you sent me.” Before waving the white flag and surrendering the relationship due to unresolved conflict, it is important that we assure that we have truly addressed our attitude, our methods of communication, and our active listening, and with an open heart sought resolution. Additionally, it is biblical that we seek a third-party mediator as Jesus commanded us in Matthew 18:15-20. It is important that the person who plays this role meets several qualifications – the mediator should be of godly character, have the best interest of both parties at heart, be mutually agreed upon and the mediator should be committed to God’s Kingdom goals and the goals of the sending church. In the event that a boundary that separates us from others in our work must be erected, we should never accept anything less than reconciliation, grace, forgiveness, and love on a personal level. Love never fails.

Summary: Loving and relating well is a paramount task. We must be diligent in the way and manner we communicate, our desire to resolve conflict, and our practice of love and relationships.

PRINCIPLES

The following are the key skills and principles highlighted in this lesson that you can apply as you love and relate well.

- Love is expensive and takes practice
- Miscommunication starts us down road to hurt and anger
- Our call is to love well
- Good communication is a practiced skill

PANORAMA

- If we do not love and relate well, we harm our witness to the gospel
- Love never fails

LEARNING ACTIVITIES ~ BEFORE YOU GO

If we wish to love and relate well, we must do more than hope that we might love or intend to love. We must love. Because living cross-culturally and relating to others in tight work relationships will test the limits of our abilities to love, we must do everything we can to train ourselves in love and practice love before we go. Below are some activities that should show us our limits and reveal our inabilities, as well as train us in loving and relating well.

Imagine

Think of that one person with whom you find difficulty or with whom you have a conflict. Imagine what it might mean for you to love and relate him or her well. What might you do to communicate better with the person?

Lifestyle

Loving and relating well are meant to be a way of life. More than occasional, necessary acts, they should be the habit of life. For loving and relating to become habits of life they must be consistently practiced. Make a conscious attempt at consistent loving and relating well with the person imagined above.

Language and Customs

How do you talk to and about others? Words reveal your heart. Are your words kind, encouraging, beneficial, and edifying? Think about what you are saying to others. And how do you speak about individuals that are not present? Would you talk the same way if they were present?

Life on Life

Avail yourself to opportunities to live and relate with others. Practiced love perfects love.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR *INTERPERSONAL RELATING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION*

Loving and relating well is formed throughout our lives. The skills and principles of conflict management and communication must be learned and refined over and over. These skills and principles must be continually reinforced. The list of books below are worthy resources for learning how to love and relate well.

Augsberger, Daniel. *Caring Enough to Confront*. Ada: Revell, 2009.

Cloud, Henry and John Townsend. *Boundaries*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1992.

A classic book on a crucial topic for making relationships work. Gives lots of guidance for those who need to improve the area of where their life stops and the other person's life starts. Especially helpful for missionaries who say, "Yes" when they should say "No."

McGinnis, Alan Loy. *The Friendship Factor*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

This is the 25th Anniversary Edition of Dr. McGinnis's normative book on this crucial topic. The international appeal of this book is illustrated by the fact that this book has been translated into fifteen languages. This resource should be a required piece of equipment every cross-cultural witness should take with them to the field.

Cloud, Henry and John Townsend. *Boundaries: Workbook*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1992.

An excellent additional resource for those who need to do more work on clarifying and strengthening boundaries in their relationships.

Forward, Susan. *Toxic Parents*. New York: Bantam Books, 1989.

A supplemental resource for those who have parents that do not respect the boundaries of their children. Practical guidance is given on how to address these parental boundary issues.

Cloud, Henry and John Townsend. *Safe People: How To Find Relationships That Are Good For You And Avoid Those That Aren't*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Provides very practical insights into a broad range of relationships as to how the reader can evaluate relationships and then choose relationships that are healthy.

Martin, Mercedes and Billy Vaughn. *Strategic Diversity & Inclusion Management Magazine*, pp. 31-36. San Francisco, CA: DTUI Publications Division, 2007.

Hesselgrave, David. *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.

Hesselgrave, David. "The Role of Culture in Communication." In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*.

Chapman, Gary. *The Five Love Languages*. Chicago: Northfield Publishers, 2015.

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