

Don't Take the Bait

The Bait of Avoiding Clay Weed

TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

1 Kings 19:1-4 (NLT)

1 When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. 2 So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them."

3 Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. 4 Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died."

1 Kings 19:8-12 (NLT)

8 So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. 9 There he came to a cave, where he spent the night. 9 But the Lord said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10 Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

11 "Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper.

1 Kings 19:15-16 (NLT)

15 Then the Lord told him, "Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. 16 Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet.

Matthew 7:1-5

Psalms 139:23-24

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- Do you think most individuals avoid confrontation with others or with themselves? If so, why?

Start **thinking**. Ask a question to get your group thinking.

- **Read 1 Kings 19:1-4.** Discuss this instance of avoiding the threat from Jezebel and compare it with Elijah's bold faith in **1 Kings 18**, with the defeat of the prophets of Baal on Mt Carmel.
- **Read 1 Kings 19:8-12.** What was Elijah's reason to go to Mt Sinai? Why does the author specify that "the Lord was not in" each of these powerful events, but spoke to Elijah as "the sounds of a gentle whisper."?
- **Read 1 Kings 19:15-16.** What are some of the reasons Elijah was commanded to anoint his own replacement, Elisha, as prophet?

Start **sharing**. Choose a question to create openness.

- Do you see yourself as a "Shouter" or a "Pouter" when you are confronted or offended? Or, are you somewhere in between?
- Pastor Clay said that when you avoid an offense without confronting it, you take on a problem that was never intended for you to carry. How does unresolved conflict affect your life?
- Do you agree that if you avoid handling things God's way that you could possibly lose some of your influence? What are some other ways that you might lose your influence?
- What are some practical ways you can stop avoiding others and yourself?
- How do you know whether the problem in a situation should be confronted with another person or within yourself? Is there such a thing as an offense or problem which should be avoided?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Identify one area where you are avoiding healthy confrontation and ask God to help you address it with grace and truth.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Jesus, we thank you that we don't have to be afraid and that you have won victory for us. Please help us to confront sin with truth and grace, in ourselves and those around us. -Amen

Start **digging**. For further study.

- Read the 2nd page and discuss it.

Question: "What does the Bible say about conflict resolution?"

Answer: Conflict resolution in the body of Christ is crucial for several reasons. Avoidance of conflict, with no effort to resolve it, postpones a proper response and exacerbates the problem because conflicts that are allowed to fester unaddressed will always increase and have negative effects on relationships within the body. The goal of conflict resolution is unity, and unity in the church poses a threat to the devil who will use every opportunity to take advantage of unresolved issues, especially those involving anger, bitterness, self-pity, and envy. These emotions are involved in most church conflicts. Scripture tells us that we're to "let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from [us], along with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). Failure to obey this command results in division in the body of Christ and grief to the Holy Spirit. We're also told not to allow a "root of bitterness" to spring up among us, leading to trouble and defilement (Hebrews 12:15). Clearly, a biblical method of conflict resolution is needed.

The New Testament has multiple commands to believers that are demonstrative of living at peace with one another. We are repeatedly instructed to love one another (John 13:34; Romans 12:10), to live in peace and harmony with one another (Romans 15:5; Hebrews 12:14), to settle our differences among ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:11), to be patient, kind, and tenderhearted toward one another (1 Corinthians 13:4), to consider others before ourselves (Philippians 2:3), to bear one another's burdens (Ephesians 4:2), and to rejoice in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6). Conflict is the antithesis of Christian behavior as outlined in Scripture.

There are times when, despite all efforts to reconcile, various issues prevent us from resolving conflict in the church. There are two places in the New Testament that clearly and unambiguously address conflict resolution where sin is involved. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gives the steps for dealing with a sinning brother. According to this passage, in the event of conflict involving overt sin, we are to address it one-on-one first, then if still unresolved it should be taken to a small group, and finally before the whole church if the problem still remains.

The other passage where this is addressed explicitly is Luke 17. In verses 3-4, Jesus says, "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." An essential part of conflict resolution is forgiveness. Any kind of disciplinary procedure should always have restoration of the sinning person as the ultimate goal.

Sometimes conflict has to do with style preferences or personality clashes more so than it has to do with sin, per se. In such cases, we do well to check our own motives and remember to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Philippians 2:3-4). If we do have a genuine disagreement with someone over stylistic preferences—the best way to accomplish a certain ministry goal, the church budget, how a church service should flow, etc.—we should engage in discussion and come to mutual agreement. In Philippians 4:2-3 Paul pleads for Euodia and Syntyche "to be of the same mind in the Lord" and for others to help them. We must humble ourselves to truly listen to one another, striving for peace within the body (Romans 12:16, 18). We should also seek God's wisdom and direction (James 1:5). It is true that sometimes it is best to part ways in recognition that God has different calls on our lives. But we should do our best never to divide in anger.

The reason conflict resolution is so difficult is that we're hesitant to place ourselves in uncomfortable situations. We're also frequently unwilling to humble ourselves enough to admit that we might be wrong or to do what it might take to make amends if we are wrong. Those who do conflict resolution best are often those who would prefer not to confront others about their sin, but still do so out of obedience to God. If the matter is relatively minor, it may be that the best thing to do is to practice forbearance and overlook the offense (Proverbs 19:11). If it cannot be overlooked, one must pursue reconciliation. This is such an important issue to God that peace with Him and peace with others are inextricably entwined (Matthew 5:23-24).