

## Pathway to Peace – Rev. Shirley Ferris

### Introduction:

God has created each one of us as unique individuals, with different opinions, convictions, values, expectations, desires, perspectives and priorities. Many of these are not inherently right or wrong, they are simply the result of God given diversity and personal preferences (I Cor. 12:31-31).

When handled properly, disagreements in these areas can stimulate productive dialogue, encourage creativity, promote helpful change and generally make life more interesting. Therefore we should seek UNITY in our relationships and not demand UNIFORMITY (Eph. 4: 1-13).

We should rejoice in the diversity of God's creation and learn to accept and work with people who simply see things differently than we do (Rom. 15:7; Rom. 14: 1-13).

Christians are people who breathe grace. They draw on the goodness and power of Jesus Christ, and then they bring His love, mercy, forgiveness, strength and wisdom to their relationships through daily life. God delights to breathe his grace through Christians and use them to dissipate anger, improve understanding, promote justice, and encourage repentance and reconciliation.

There will be conflict in this world! You only need to turn on the radio.....read the newspaper or watch the news to see and hear a vast array of conflict in the world. There is conflict in our communities (wind power, water resources. You only need to read any of the local papers to keep up to date on conflict between elected officials on the local councils. Churches are not immune to conflict. We may find ourselves presently engaged in some kind of conflict. However, there are healthy responses and unhealthy responses to dealing with various situations regarding conflict.

### Review the Slippery Slope:

Slippery slope comes from Peacemaker Ministries (Ken Sande ..... Billings Montana)

Unhealthy responses fall into 2 categories on this slippery slope: Escape and Attack

#### **Escape Responses:** Focus is on "Me"

1. Denial: This is not a healthy relationship skill. Denial is pretending that something does not exist. We deny that the relationship is unhealthy, we deny conflict and refuse to work at making the relationship healthy. (Gen 16:1-6; 1 Sa. 2:22-25)

2. Flight: Sometimes people will simply run away from a situation and that is not healthy. Running away simply postpones a proper solution. Sometimes individuals need to withdraw from a relationship for a brief period to calm down, organize their thoughts and pray. Flight can be a legitimate response if danger is imminent (abusive relationships).
  
3. Suicide: When people lose all hope of resolving a conflict, they may seek to escape the situation or make a desperate cry for help. Suicide is never the right way to deal with conflict. Tragically, however, suicide is a leading cause of death particularly among adolescents. “Youth are among the highest risk population for suicide. In Canada suicide accounts for 24 % of all deaths among 15 – 24 year olds and 16% among 16 – 44 year olds” (Canadian Mental Health Association - Toronto Branch). In this response people have lost all hope and seek to escape.

**Attack Responses:** Focus is on winning not in preserving the relationship. Often this is a response by individuals who desire to assert their rights, desire control of the relationship or want to take advantage of others.

1. Assault: It is not a healthy relationship if someone tries to overcome another by using force, intimidation, verbal attacks (including gossip and slander), physical violence or efforts to damage a person financially or professionally (Acts 6:8-15)
  
2. Litigation: Another way to make people bend to our will is to take them to court. This does not build a healthy relationship. Lawsuits tend to damage relationships. Christians are commanded to settle their differences within the church rather than in civil courts. (1 Cor. 6:1-8; Matt. 5:25-26)
  
3. Murder: We usually think of murder as taking someone’s life. However, we stand guilty of murder in God’s eyes when we have anger or contempt in our hearts towards others. The sin of harbouring anger or resentment is the same as committing murder.

*“Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” 1 John 3: 15*

*“But I tell you anyone who is angry with his brother is subject to judgement....”*

Matt. 5: 21-22

This scripture illustrates many of the items from the slippery slope, responses that we have talked about.

"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. **Go, sleep with my slave**; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and **gave her to her husband** to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "**You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering (blame, denial)**. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

"Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then **Sarai mistreated (assault) Hagar; so she fled from her (flight)**.

The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm **running away (flight)** from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

Then the angel of the LORD told her, "**Go back (seek reconciliation)** to your mistress and submit to her."

Genesis 16: 1-9

Healthy relationships depend on healthy responses such as: (show the slippery slope again) The middle segment is called personal peacemaking and assisted peacemaking. It is important to note that as you move to the right more people are involved and you have less control over the outcome. In overlooking, reconciliation and negotiation you have control over this. In mediation, arbitration and accountability (church discipline) you have no control. It then becomes a 3<sup>rd</sup> party decision. The choice is yours. You as an individual can choose the path to peace that you will follow in order to maintain a healthy relationship.

Reference the Romans text..."as far as it depends on you" (live at peace with everyone....make healthy choices. These will be looked at in more detail over the next few Sundays. But I want to explain the difference between denial and overlook. They are side by side on the slippery slope (show the slope). One is healthy and one is unhealthy

1. Overlook: Overlook differs from denial. In denial, we deny that the problem exists. Overlooking is a deliberate decision to not talk about a situation, not dwell on it or to let it grow into bitterness and anger (Prov. 19:11) "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." It is important to know whether we are consciously making a decision to overlook or whether it is denial.
2. Reconciliation: Christ has given his followers a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5: 18-19)

*"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."*

2 Cor. 5: 18-19

God created each of us with unique qualities and differences. He knew there would be differences of opinion, different values, expectations resulting in possible conflict. However, he also gave us a manual which outlines the methods and tools for resolving conflict and showing us how to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

In order to live in harmony with others and to enjoy healthy relationships, we need to depend on what are called the 4 G's

**Path to Peace: The Four "G's"**

1. Glorify God
2. Get the Log Out
3. Gently Restore
4. Go and be Reconciled

Following each of these paths will lead to healthy relationships in families, marriages, churches and in our communities.

Romans 12: 18.....this is what we are instructed to do.....

"if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone".

How do we do this in life?

We do this by following the 4 G's.

**Path to Peace**

1. Glorify God

*1 Cor. 10: 31-33*

*"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God – even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ."*

This passage is a radical view of what we called to do in all circumstances of life. It encourages us to glorify God, serve others and grow to be like Christ.

Healthy Christian relationships bring honour and glory to God by revealing the love and power of Jesus Christ. When healthy relationships draw on His grace, follow his example and put the teachings of Jesus into practice they will find freedom from impulsive, self-centred decisions that impact relationships in an unhealthy way. As Christians, we should strive to bring praise to God by displaying the power of the gospel in our lives and to live at peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18).

We bring glory to God when we learn to develop and maintain healthy relationships. We bring glory to God when we can live at peace with everyone. We bring glory to God when we.....

1. Recognize that our values and expectations may differ (use our marriage example)
2. Develop positive communication skills
  - a. Make eye contact....put your phone away, turn off the sound, no distractions
  - b. Be aware of your "position" ...i.e. sit beside (angle) or facing
  - c. Nod to acknowledge you are listening (but don't be a bobble head)
  - d. Repeat what you heard.....did you say.....
  - e. Be conscious of your tone of voice..... (harsh or gentle)
  - f. Use I statements.....not "you"

Why didn't you call me to say you were going to be late?

Or ..... I was disappointed that you didn't call.....

Attack responses will often start with "you"!

"You" statements cause people to go on the defensive but with "I" statements you are sharing your personal thoughts and feelings.

We bring glory to God when we.....

3. Avoid Competition for Resources (land, water, livestock)
4. Check our own sinful Attitudes and Desires (James 4:1-2) "What causes fights and quarrels among you? ..... You want something but don't get it!"

## **Pathway to Peace**

### 2. Get the Log Out of your Eye (Matthew 7:5)

*“You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”*

In order to develop and maintain healthy relationships we must look very carefully at our own contributions to the relationship because conflict starts in the heart.

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” Matthew 15:19

Our heart is the source of our thoughts, desires, words and actions. Therefore, it also is the source of our conflicts. We call these “idols of the heart”.

In churches, common idols of the heart include things such as

- a. Style of worship
- b. Paint colour for the bathroom
- c. The way in which people dress
- d. Church buildings and furnishings (stain glass windows)

In order to get the log out of our own eye we must look inward at ourselves. The focus is on “me”. We can gain insight into building a healthy relationship if we examine our heart. A close examination of our heart should reveal the progression of ‘idols of the heart’. Most of us think of an idol as a statue of wood, stone and something that is worshipped by pagan people. But the concept of idolatry is much broader.

An idol is anything apart from God that we depend on to be happy, fulfilled or secure. In biblical terms, it is something we have set our heart on, (Luke 12:29; 1 Cor. 10:19); it is something that masters and rules us (Psalm 119:133; Eph. 5:5), or it is something that we trust, fear, or serve (Isa. 42:17; Matt. 6: 24; Luke 12: 4-5).

**Progression of an Idol:** We need to look inward and ask ourselves some questions!

- a. What is my desire? How is my desire interfering with building a healthy relationship? Focusing on our own desires leads to self-pity and bitterness towards those who stand in our way. Unmet desires have the potential to work deeper into our hearts and become demands.
- b. What is my demand? How is my demand interfering with this relationship? Demands lead to judging!

- c. How am I judging? “Who are you to judge your neighbour?” James 4:12
- d. How am I punishing? Idols demand sacrifices and when someone fails to meet our expectations, our idols demands that they should suffer. The most common means of punishment is to give the cold shoulder, speak slander (James 4: 11) or criticism behind someone’s back, use harsh words or physical violence. Often individuals withdraw from a relationship or withdraw from the church. We as a church body are not immune to any of this. As James 4: 1-3 teaches, inflicting pain on others is one of the surest signs that an idol is ruling our hearts.
- e. Do I need to check my attitude and change it? Sometimes we need to check our attitude in the light of God’s word.
- f. The path to healthy relationships requires that we look also to the interests of others.

*“Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.” Phil. 2:4*

When we have conflict in our lives, we should look to God and glorify God. What does this instructional manual tell us about dealing with conflict and building healthy relationships? We must carefully look at ourselves. Take the log out of our own eye!

Look at our own heart to see if we are being controlled by unmet desires that we have turned into idols. These desires love to disguise themselves as things we need or deserve, or even as things that would advance God’s kingdom. When we break free from the desires that have fueled our conflicts, we can resolve seemingly hopeless disputes and become more effective peacemakers.

*“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Romans 12:18*