

FINDING AN ANTIDOTE TO CONSTANT CONFLICT

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Have you ever watched one of those beauty contests where they ask each of the finalists, "If you are selected Miss (fill in the blank), what would be one of your goals during your reign?" Invariably, one of them will respond, without blinking an eye, "I would like to work for world peace!" A worthy goal, no doubt, but it sounds like such a naïve, simplistic answer that it makes you want to laugh.

Mankind and conflict have coexisted since the beginning of time. Can you think of any time in history when there was not some kind of war or battle of consequence, much less interpersonal squabbles? It seems easier to fly without aid of an airplane or rocket than to ever see global peace achieved.

And as we all know, the business and professional world is no exception. In fact, sometimes it seems the workplace fosters more conflict than anywhere else: Companies in a death struggle to secure a major customer from one another. Employers seeking to maximize employee productivity while providing minimal compensation and benefits. Coworkers competing aggressively – whatever it takes – to win an important promotion. Competitors seeking to gain an edge by uncovering one another's secret plans.

So where do we find peace? Certainly not through good intentions and wishful thinking. Even the Bible – in which Jesus promised his followers "peace that passes all understanding" – honestly presents more than its share of conflict. It has been observed only four chapters of the entire Bible present no conflict – the first two chapters of Genesis (the creation account) and the last two chapters of Revelation (which prophecies a new heaven and new earth).

Yet, in the midst of the chaos and conflict that comprise the biblical narrative, God makes the astonishing claim that true peace is indeed attainable. The Bible promises that we can experience peace not only with God, but also peace with one another. We will look at this topic again in a future "Monday Manna," but consider some of the things the Bible says about conflict – and peace:

The source of conflict. At the root of it all, the Bible says, we insist on having things only one way – our way. We want what we want – when we want it – and it does not matter how we get it. *"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God"* (James 4:1-2).

The symptom of conflict. When conflict occurs, we generally cast blame in the opposite direction. We criticize others, while defending ourselves. *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?... 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"* (Matthew 7:1-5).

The solution for conflict. Often we try to "keep peace" by ignoring conflict or attempting to reach some kind of settlement. Yet hostile feelings remain. A better course is not to settle just for resolution, but for reconciliation – healing and restoration of the relationship. *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift"* (Matthew 5:23-24).

