

Opportunity Knocks

By Jean Hayward

Written February 17, 2008

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18 [NIV]

Opportunity Missed

Conflict came quickly to me several years ago as an elder in the church I attend. At the beginning of a 3 year term I was assigned to oversee two ministries. They were experiencing serious conflict. Working with the leadership of the church, all parties made every attempt to help

If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. [Proverbs 1:23 NIV]

Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker:

- Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons,
- And you shall commit to Me the work of My hands.

[Isaiah 45:11 New American Standard Bible – emphasis added]

resolve the issues in both ministries. Unfortunately reconciliation didn't happen and individuals left the church angry, hurt, and bitter. It is fair to say that those who stayed shared the same emotions as well as a deep sadness. During this period I became aware of Peacemaker Ministries a Para church ministry. The Peacemaker mission is to equip and assist churches and their congregations in conflict resolution.

[Salt and Light] "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. [Matthew 5:13 NIV]

The Work (Of His Hands) Starts

A sense of conviction came over me that this type of conflict between fellow Christians must grieve our Lord. I would recall during this period that Jesus calls us to be

salt and light to a broken and hurting world. I heard that Ken Sande, author of the book titled

“The Peacemaker-A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict”, was speaking in Mountain View, California. I went to hear him, knowing I was ill equipped to assist others, based on my recent experience.

What I heard that day spoke loudly. I wasn't hearing anything new as a Christian. I was hearing the Gospel. The very path that reconciles us back to God, repentance, confession, and forgiveness are the components of reconciling with each other.

What I heard was an explanation of a systematic approach on how to apply biblical principles to broken relationships to bring glory to God.

I approached the leadership of the church with the material. It was decided to offer a class teaching the principles to see if we could generate interest and support to bring the ministry to the church.

The class was scheduled to be held in three months and I began to prepare immediately. I am not a trained teacher but I wasn't going to let this opportunity pass.

How To Get The Heart Involved

Two weeks before the class, I had a major argument with my husband. The kind where you can barely speak civilly to each other much less be in the same room together. When I went to bed that night I could not sleep as I was rehearsing

[Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while [a]ffectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight. [Philippians 2:13 Amplified]

the argument, listing all my justifications for being angry and the wound was festering.

I finally got out of bed and went into the den. I realized I was in no position to be teaching this class if this remained my response and state of heart. My thoughts were, "I can't teach this class. I CAN'T teach this class." I made the decision to call the pastor over adult equipping the next morning and tell him we would have to cancel the class.

... The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. [Acts 16:14 NIV]

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. [1 Peter 2:12 NIV]

A Personal Word

And then God began to speak to me. He brought to mind all the things I had been learning.

Writing On My Heart

First, my life as a follower of Jesus Christ is to glorify God. I am to ask the question. "How can I please and honor God in this situation?" My heart attitude, my angry words were doing just the opposite.

My Contribution

Second I am to ask myself, "How have I contributed to the conflict?" I surely wasn't making any attempt to resolve the conflict. I wanted to go before a "court" and plead my case so my husband would be pronounced guilty.

Let angry people endure the backlash of their own anger; if you try to make it better, you'll only make it worse. [Proverbs 19:19 Message]

There are many more steps to the process but these two questions brought me to a place where I could look at my part and begin to seek reconciliation.

My thoughts could probably have been summarized by what Ezekiel says in 33:12-13 [The Message]

There's more, son of man. Tell your people, 'A good person's good life won't save him when he decides to rebel, and a bad person's bad life won't prevent him from repenting of his rebellion. A good person who sins can't expect to live when he chooses to sin. It's true that I tell good people, "Live! Be alive!" But if they trust in their good deeds and turn to evil, that good life won't amount to a hill of beans. They'll die for their evil life.

But we know in Christ all are forgiven. We just need to accept that forgiveness.

As I processed all that I had been learning, I felt the anger subside, a new openness to gain a better understanding of what happened. I went to bed and slept well the remainder of the night.

A Heart Of Flesh

When I woke in the morning I realized God had given me a gift; a new heart. I could teach this class.

Fools have short fuses and explode all too quickly; the prudent quietly shrug off insults. [Proverbs 12:16 Message]

I COULD teach this class.

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. [Ezekiel 11:19 NIV]

My husband and I did work through the conflict and I need to confess that there was misunderstanding on my part. I was all too ready to

bring judgment and speak hurtful unkind words. My response to his action only exacerbated the situation.

I actually experienced it, did you see it? Repentance? I saw my sin. Confession? I confessed it to my husband. Forgiveness? I received forgiveness. Because of my responding to God's grace, our relationship was not damaged by harbored anger, resentment, and bitterness that would inevitably "leak out" in our ongoing life together.

"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." [2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV]

If I had retained those bad thoughts and desires for being right in my heart they would inevitably leak out in my tone of voice, my body language, and gestures, skeptical comments etc. Instead, there was healing. Our relationship became healthier. I have come to understand that conflict provides opportunities. Opportunity to glorify God, serve others and grow to be like Christ. I truly believe that what comes into my life is an assignment by God as He wants to bring about something good from the conflict we experience.

After Thought:

Proverbs 15 (The Message)

God Doesn't Miss a Thing

- 1 A gentle response defuses anger, but a sharp tongue kindles a temper-fire.
- 2 Knowledge flows like spring water from the wise; fools are leaky faucets, dripping nonsense.
- 3 God doesn't miss a thing— he's alert to good and evil alike.
- 4 Kind words heal and help; cutting words wound and maim.

Peacemaker's Pledge

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict. (Matt. 5:9; Luke 6:27-36; Gal. 5:19-26 - full text below). We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ. (Rom. 8:28-29; 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1; James 1:2-4)

Contact Information

Jean Hayward: jeanhayward@sbcglobal.net
Peacemaker Ministries: www.peacemaker.net

YOUR BROTHER HAS SOMETHING AGAINST YOU

This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.

Or say you're out on the street and an old enemy accosts you. Don't lose a minute. Make the first move; make things right with him. After all, if you leave the first move to him, knowing his track record, you're likely to end up in court, maybe even jail. Matthew 5:23-25 [The Message]

YOU HAVE SOMETHING AGAINST YOUR BROTHER

If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If he still won't listen, tell the church. If he won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love. Matthew 18:15-17 [The Message]