

# Peace-making or Peace-faking?: The Art of Conflict Resolution

Jay R. Feld, D.Min., LMFT

## Some introductory thoughts about conflict:

1. Conflict is natural.
  - a. We all have different gifts (I Corinthians 12).
  - b. We all have different temperaments/motivations (“Poor baby, get up!” vs. “Get up, poor baby!”).
2. Conflict is potentially constructive – no one person can see the whole picture (e.g., the Elephant and the Blind Men).
3. Conflict is inevitable – we’re fallen people in a fallen society in a fallen world.
  - a. Caused by sin (James 4:1 – “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?”)
  - b. Both the Creation mandate (“subdue the earth”) and the Great Commission (“the gates of hell will not prevail”) imply the persistence of conflict.
  - c. “Growing pains” in the family of God (Ephesians 4:15).
4. Conflict is often painful – it can hurt individuals, relationships and communities.

## Key passage

### 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (NIV)

And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. [25] Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, [26] and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

### 2 Tim. 2:24-26 (The Message)

God's servant must not be argumentative, but a gentle listener and a teacher who keeps cool, [25] working firmly but patiently with those who refuse to obey. You never know how or when God might sober them up with a change of heart and a turning to the truth, [26] enabling them to escape the Devil's trap, where they are caught and held captive, forced to run his errands.

### “The Lord’s servant ...”

James 3:1 (NIV) – Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

James 3:1 (*The Message*) – Don't be in any rush to become a teacher, my friends. Teaching is highly responsible work. Teachers are held to the strictest standards.

### “... must not quarrel ...”

- ◆ “Pursue ... peace” (2 Tim. 2:22) ... “Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels” (2 Tim. 2:23).
- ◆ “quarreling” – trying to resolve **content** issues before you’ve established a healthy **process**.
  - “Healthy process” – speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15); being **both** honest **and** kind.
  - James 1:19-20 (NIV) – “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

People do not wish to appear foolish; to avoid the appearance of foolishness, they are willing to remain actually fools. – Alice Walker

“... *instead* ...”

- James 3:18 (*The Message*) – “You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results **only if you do the hard work** of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.”
- Goal: To create “big enough” relationships.

“... *s/he must be kind to everyone* ...”

- ◆ “Be kind” – **empathy** (identifying a place in yourself that resonates with the other person’s feelings) and **sympathy** (actually feeling those feelings yourself).

“There must be a reason why s/he is behaving like this ...  
I wonder what s/he might be feeling?”

A friend knows the song in your heart  
And can sing it back to you  
When you have forgotten how it goes.  
(Robert J. Wicks, *Living a Gentle, Passionate Life*, p. 53)

When a trout rising to a fly gets hooked on a line and finds himself unable to swim about freely, he begins with a fight which results in struggles and splashes and sometimes an escape. Often, of course, the situation is too tough for him.

In the same way the human being struggles with his environment and with the hooks that catch him. Sometimes he masters his difficulties; sometimes they are too much for him. His struggles are all that the world sees and it naturally misunderstands them. It is hard for a free fish to understand what is happening to a hooked one.

Karl A. Menninger, *The Human Mind*

“... *able to teach* ...”

- ◆ “Able to teach” what?
  - the way of love
  - listening to people
  - peace-making
  - receiving feedback from
  - reconciliation
  - people, listening patiently to
  - accepting people
  - their point of view and their
  - respecting people
  - objections (their anxieties)
- ◆ “Able to teach” – Teaching is “causing to learn,” not just giving information to people, but making it **desirable** and **easy** for them to learn. When anxiety goes up, learning becomes less attractive and more difficult.
  - “A wise teacher makes learning a joy” (Proverbs 15:2, *The Living Bible*)

**“... not resentful ...”**

- ◆ “An expectation is a premeditated resentment” (12 Step slogan).
- ◆ Expectations – assumptions I make about my relationships with others, that are *unconscious, unspoken, unrealistic, and un-agreed upon* (adapted from “The Third Option”).

**“... Those who oppose her/him s/he must gently instruct ...”**

- ◆ Cultivating “non-anxious presence” helps me to instruct others gently. “Non-anxious presence” means ...
  - being able to identify what I’m feeling, and “owning” my feelings. People don’t “make me feel” things – my feelings are the result of my own internal process.
  - practicing self-soothing thoughts and behaviors.
  - observing without labeling, interpreting, evaluating or judging. “Observing without evaluating is the highest form of intelligence” (Marshall Rosenberg, Nonviolent Communication).
  - speaking clearly and directly.
  - speaking with kindness.
  - exploring; being curious; hearing the “Please help me!” behind the anxiety (e.g., Why is the baby crying?).
- ◆ Your job is *to ask* for what you need, *not to change* the other person.

**“... in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”**

- ◆ oppositional people are themselves victims, or they have been victims in the past, and they still bear the scars of their victimization.
- ◆ Luke 23:34 – “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

<p>God, grant me          The SERENITY to accept the things I cannot change,          COURAGE to change the things I can, and          WISDOM to know the difference.</p>
---