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CROSSING THE CHASM OF CONFLICT

Part 1: "A Fight to the Better End"

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Acts 6:1-7

Peace. It is something that should characterize our relationships within the body of Christ. Most of us have no problem taking a step toward agreeing with such a proposition. But, for too many of us, the next step we take is a faulty one: we make the erroneous assumption that peace in our relationships will involve the absence of conflict. As a result, we adopt a pattern of avoiding and ignoring conflict. That step will always lead to relationships that are less than healthy. The reason? Conflict is not the enemy of peace. *Unresolved* conflict is!

Of course, conflict is not a pleasant thing to experience in any relationship. Yet it is inevitable if we are relating with other people to any degree of authenticity and depth. In fact, conflict—when dealt with properly—can actually serve to *increase* the health and intimacy of a relationship. Therefore it is vital that we learn how to cross the chasm of conflict.

Before we complete our study of Philippians—*Whistling in the Dark*—we are going to linger on the reality that we saw revealed in Phil. 4:2-3: they encountered conflict in their relationships. Relationships in the church at Philippi experienced the same ebbs and flows that we encounter in our relationships today.

What are your natural tendencies when it comes to conflict? Avoid it? Pretend it isn't there? Compete to win? Yield, give in at all costs? Compromise? Healthy conflict resolution will take us past these superficial options into the arena of actually *resolving* conflict and becoming reconciled with each other. When the believers in the early church in Jerusalem encountered a conflict we read about in Acts 6, they journeyed past the inadequate ways of dealing with conflict and actually resolved it.

Six steps toward crossing the chasm of conflict:

1. _____: **submit to the most important Person.**
Proverbs 13:10 *Pride only breeds quarrels...*,
1 Peter 5:5 *...All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*
2. _____: **carefully process and pray.**
Matt. 7:3 *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?*
Proverbs 25:8 *Do not go out hastily to argue your case; otherwise, what will you do in the end, when your neighbor puts you to shame?*
3. _____: **deal with the conflict quickly.**
Eph. 4:26 *In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry...*
4. _____: **seek understanding.**
James 1:19 *Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,*
Eph. 4:15 *...speaking the truth in love.*
5. _____: **acknowledge the importance of the relationship(s).**
Proverbs 16:28 *A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.*
Proverbs 26:20 *Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.*
James 3:5 *...the tongue is a small part of the body... Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.*
6. _____: **if necessary, involve a third party.**
Proverbs 11: 14 *For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure.*
Proverbs 13:10 *...but wisdom is found in those who take advice.*