

THE STRUGLE

Week 4 - Sledgehammers vs. Scalpels

THE MAIN POINT

Conflict shouldn't be indulged, and can become toxic; however, handled well, it can also help us get healthy, emotionally and spiritually. While conflict can be harmful, avoiding conflict can also be harmful. This week will challenge students to consider a specific conflict in his/her life and how they might take a step to resolve it.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Snacks
- Prize for anyone that remembers the verse from last week
- Props for conflict scenarios (if wanted)

GETTING STARTED

Welcome back this week! At the end of last week, we challenged you with a verse that is helpful when it comes to conflict. Does anyone remember that verse, or what it says?

*James 1:19 "Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry." *Throw out a small prize to anyone who was able to quote or summarize the verse*

As a good reminder, since we're talking about conflict, let's remember our group rules so we can avoid conflict!

RULES FOR SMALL GROUP:

Commitment - Commit to being at every group meeting (make it a priority!)

Confidentiality - What is shared here stays here.

Be honest or be silent - don't make up an answer just to have one. Sometimes the most honest answer is no answer, so if you need to, just say pass.

Respect - for one another, their thoughts/ideas/opinions (no put downs).

- And now, let's test your memory again this week! What do you remember from the last three weeks of this series on conflict?
 - a. Remember the story about Esau, Jacob and their mother Rebecca? Each of them approached conflict in a different way. Do you remember what the 3 ways were? What are the advantages and drawbacks of each?
 - b. Last week, we talked about two ways people *react* to things that happen to us. Do you remember what they were, and what they meant? (Thermometers, thermostats)
- What have you learned about yourself through this series?

ACTIVITY

Divide your students into pairs. Give each pair a "Conflict Story" to act out. (For fun, you may want to bring props.) Give them 3 minutes to assign roles and decide what will happen; they have 30 seconds to act out their conflict. ***They do not have to resolve it, but there has to be a definitive endpoint.*** (a closing statement like "If I can't trust you to tell me the truth, how can I trust you at all?" or "Fine, I'll just stay here; YOU go out.")

Here are a few Conflict Story examples:

An argument between a high school student and a parent (options below):

- *how late they are allowed to stay out*
- *a bad report card*
- *chores the son/daughter doesn't want to complete*

A friend argument (options below):

- *Friend #1 stood up Friend #2*
- *Friend #1 wants the two of them to go out and meet up with other friends; Friend #2 wants to stay home and play video games*
- *Friend #1 finds out Friend #2 lied to them, and calls them out*

A sibling argument (options below):

- *The younger sibling borrowed the older one's clothes without asking*
- *The older sibling gets the younger one in trouble with Mom, not realizing the younger one didn't do anything wrong*

Have the students act out their respective arguments (30 seconds each).

GOING DEEPER

How many of you identified with at least one of these conflict stories?

Stories like this feel a little TOO familiar, don't they? Some of us enjoy conflict a little too much; most of us would rather find an easier way out. Conflict is a sign we're not right with someone else. And more often than not, these conflicts involved someone who's very important in our lives.

We often handle conflict like a sledgehammer. The conflict comes up and we just start swinging harsh words in a loud volume busting everything in our path. People get hurt. Relationships are ruined.

- Have you ever handled a conflict like a sledgehammer?

A well-handled conflict is like a scalpel.

Let's explore this a little:

- Who knows what a scalpel is? (Pull up a picture of a scalpel on your phone.) It's used to perform surgery, right?
- What does it say about someone's body if they need surgery? *Something's wrong*
- Is surgery enjoyable? *No way*
- Is surgery necessary sometimes? *Absolutely*
- Let's say, for example, that you incurred a sports injury – a broken leg, a torn ACL, etc. If this happened, ***would you look forward to the operation?*** *You may not be ecstatic that you need surgery. The operation itself may freak you out. But will you be glad you had it?*

- So how can conflict be handled like a scalpel?

Several thousand years ago, there was a man named Joseph. Joseph had eleven brothers, yet was his father's favorite. Out of jealousy, his brothers sold him to Egyptian merchants as a slave. You can see how this would be a source of conflict...

In Egypt, Joseph was thrown in prison for an offense he did NOT commit. Yet he cared for his fellow prisoners, and even interpreted dreams for them. A few years later, Pharaoh (the King of Egypt) had a dream that troubled him. Joseph, still a prisoner, was brought to Pharaoh. When Joseph explained that Pharaoh's dream predicted a seven-year famine in the not-too-distant future, Pharaoh not only freed Joseph from prison, but appointed Joseph as Ruler of all Egypt!!

Joseph led Egypt through preparations, and Egypt had more than enough food stored away when the famine arrived.

But Joseph's family back in Canaan had run out of food because of the famine. They went to Egypt and begged the Ruler of Egypt for food. They did not recognize their brother, Joseph, but he immediately recognized them. He tested them to see if they were truly sorry for what they had done years earlier. The brother they had sold into slavery years earlier was now their only hope for survival!

Eventually, Joseph revealed to his brothers who he was. This could have been an awkward moment, or even an outright disaster. But notice how Joseph handles it.

Read Genesis 45:1-15.

- What surprises you about this conversation?
- There was undoubtedly brokenness in the relationship between Joseph and his brothers. There was potential for things to get even worse. But notice how Joseph approaches his brothers:
 - a. Does Joseph lose his temper with his brothers? (no)
 - b. Does he avoid talking about what they had done to him years earlier? (no)
 - c. Does he pretend that selling him into slavery was OK? (no)
 - d. Does he add other problems to the original conflict? (no)
 - e. Does he say, "You guys are starving, which is what you deserve"? (no)
 - f. What **does** he do? (*speaks honestly, directly... expresses his heart to them... doesn't excuse their actions, but talks about how God used it for good*)
- Do you think this conversation was like surgery? How were Joseph's words to his brothers like a scalpel?

- Do you think Joseph's relationship with his brothers after this talk got worse, stayed the same, or was better than it ever had been? Why?

Remember those conflicts we acted out in the activity? Let's look at them again. (Leader: review each of the example stories from the activities and ask the young people who acted them out to answer the questions below first.)

- a. We've seen the tension in our Conflict Story. But is there a way this conflict could actually *help* both people? How?
- b. How could this conflict be resolved more effectively?

Let's review what we've covered for these past several weeks.

Two weeks ago, we examined how we approach conflict. Some of us move toward RAGE and face conflict a little too directly, others act RESENTFUL and create drama, and still others RUN AWAY.

Last week, we talked about how we react to difficult situations. Some of us are like thermometers; when things get uncomfortable, we are easily provoked and react, often negatively. Some of us are like thermostats; we're more likely to regulate things, usually in a calming way, but sometimes avoiding what needs to happen.

This week, we've talked about how conflict, even though it's uncomfortable, can actually make things better than they were before.

- What makes a conflict healthy? *When it helps us to be honest... when we are willing to listen and understand...when we approach conflict hoping for a resolution*
- What makes a conflict unhealthy? *When we refuse to listen... when we can't or won't understand the other person's perspective... when there is other "baggage"*

When we handle conflict like sledgehammers, people get hurt. You might "win" the argument or fight, but everyone actually loses. Sledgehammers handle conflict with the desire to win at all costs.

Handling conflict like a scalpel is most concerned about healing relationships, gaining understanding, and growing as people.

TAKE AWAY

In closing, think of a recent conflict you've had, or are still dealing with.

- What about that conflict has been unhealthy?

- What would it take to make things right?
- What's standing in the way?

If you have time, journal about this this week, or even talk to one of your close friends about it. See if you can make some decisions on how to move forward!