Moving through Conflict to Community

Solomon's Conflict Management Cycle: Conflict-Choice-Change-Community

(I Kings 3:5-28)

      I.   **Conflict (I Kings 3:5-15; 3:16-22)**

              Positive or Negative

      II.   **Choice (I Kings 3:23-25)**

              Wise or Foolish

      III.   **Change (I Kings 3:26)**

              Truth or Pretense

      IV.   **Community (I Kings 3:27-28)**

              Deepened or Lessened

Application: What positive or negative conflict is at the forefront of my life?

      Have my choices been wise or foolish?

      What changes have resulted from my choices, truth or pretense?

      Am I experiencing deepened or lessened community?

Assignment: Begin reading one chapter of Proverbs each day. Correlate the chapter

number with the day of the month. Pray for wisdom.

*Wisdom Works*heet

Are you *caught* or *taught* in the cycle of conflict in your life? A cycle repeats the same behavior. *Conflict* is literally defined as two objects attempting to occupy the same space at the same time (from the Latin words *con* meaning "together" and *fligere* meaning "to strike"). Two toddlers want the same toy. Two teenagers make simultaneous plans to use the same car. Two adults desire the same job. Two bills draw on the same, overextended checking account. Two companies seek the same customers. Two churches ask the same person for his time, talent, and treasures.

What or who do we choose? Is conflict a zero sum game? Does someone always have to lose when another wins? Does conflict always have to be a crisis of "either or?" In his attempt to lead his people three thousand years ago, King Solomon had the same questions about conflict. So when God offered him the opportunity to choose anything that God could give him, Solomon chose wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-15). Consequently, the world flocked to the king for his discernment in their conflict. The wisdom of his first judicial decision rang throughout the kingdom in a story that demonstrated Solomon's Cycle of Wise Conflict Management—moving through conflict to community.

Conflict is either *positive* or *negative* (1 Kings 3:16-22). Not all conflict is bad. Positive conflict includes two good objects attempting to occupy the same space at the same time such as the scenario in lifting weights, studying, or working. Negative conflict (arguments, fist-fights, or cheating) includes at least one bad option and is usually a result of sinful behavior. That was the scene in Solomon's first case when two prostitutes

arrived with their story. They had lived together, each giving birth to a child within three days of each other. During the night one smothered her child in her sleep. When she discovered her nightmare, she exchanged her dead baby for her sleeping roommate's live infant. The dawn of the new day brought negative conflict—two women wanted the same live baby, but only one was his true mother.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Define the conflict that is at the forefront of your life. Is it positive or negative? Write down on a note card what two objects in your life are attempting to occupy the same space at the same time.

Conflict presents us with a *choice* that will be either *wise* or *foolish* (1 Kings 3:23-25). King Solomon was presented with a choice; his would be either wise or foolish. After confirming his understanding of the conflict brought before him, Solomon called for a sword so that he could cut the live baby in half, giving half to one woman and half to the other. His wisdom was about to uncover one woman's truth and another woman's pretense.

Pause and Let Wisdom work

Examine whether the conflict in your life has been caused or perpetuated by a foolish choice. If so, complete the following sentence, and write it on the same note card, *"I fostered this conflict when I made the choice to…"* If your choices regarding the conflict have been wise, then thank God for the wisdom that He is teaching you through the struggle, writing it on the same card.

Choice brings *change* which reveals either *truth* or *pretense* (1 Kings 3:26). The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her baby. Consequently,

she begged the king to give the child to the other prostitute who challenged King Solomon to carry out the execution so that neither would have him. Solomon's wise choice revealed one woman's truth and another woman's pretense.

Pause and Let Wisdom work

Reflect on whether your choices regarding your conflict brought change that revealed either truth or pretense in your life. Write down the result on the same card by completing the following sentence, *"My choices regarding the conflict have revealed this change in the relationship…"* Notice the correlation between wise choices and revealed truth as well as foolish choices and revealed pretense.

Change affects *community* which is either *deepened* or *lessened* (1 Kings 3:27-28). Solomon gave the baby to the mother who had pleaded for his life because her self-sacrificial heart revealed that she was his true mother. Solomon's wise choice revealed the truth about the conflict causing all Israel to hold the king in awe for his wisdom. Solomon's wise choice led to deepened community.

Too often, we respond to conflict with a foolish choice that leads to pretense—we continue to hide the truth, and our relationships suffer. The result is lessened community. The hinge point that determines whether we move through conflict to deepened community is a wise choice.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Pray, asking God to reveal to you the deepened or lessened community within the relationship in conflict. Define the conflict—what two objects are attempting to occupy the same space at the same time. Examine whether your choices have been wise or foolish. Reflect on the change that your choices brought to the relationship—did they

reveal truth or pretense. Determine the affect on community. Was it deepened or lessened?

Summary

Conflict presents a choice. Choice brings change. Change affects community. Community creates conflict. Solomon left us a legacy of nearly one thousand wise sayings for dealing with conflict assembled in the book of *Proverbs*, meaning "generally true most of the time." The opposite of wisdom is foolishness, and generally true most of the time, left to ourselves, our choices are foolish. Thus, we find ourselves *caught* in the cycle of negative conflict followed by foolish choices that bring the change of pretense which lessens community. Since three millennia have not changed man's fallen nature, God's wisdom is still relevant to us today. Through the study of Proverbs, we can be *taught* to move from the foolish side of conflict's equation to the wise one, from the *crisis* of "either or" in *conflict* to the "both and" of *community* discovered through wisdom: *both* God's righteousness *and* street smarts.

Pause and Let Wisdom Work

Read one chapter of Proverbs each day during the next year, delving into the chapter number that corresponds with the date of the month. You will read through Proverbs' 31 chapters 12 times during the next year. Each day, pray for wisdom and apply one verse to your tasks. You will move through conflict to community.