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## **DEVELOPING CONFLICT RESISTANT RELATIONSHIPS (PART 2)**

2 Corinthians Series | *2 Corinthians 12:15-13:4*

[PRAYER] Lord, there's some real needs represented in this room right now. Physical needs, emotional needs, spiritual needs, directional needs, housing needs, financial problems. Lord, we come before you right now and ask you to speak, direct, empower, encourage. We thank you for worship that inspires us. We thank you for fellowship that encourages us. And now we ask to use your word to touch us deeply in our hearts. Sometimes we believe things or we doubt things that get us into trouble. We know your word can guide those beliefs and truths inside of our hearts. So we're asking now, Lord, that you speak to us and you teach us some things that we'll be able to use in our lives this week. Most importantly, we want to say we love you. Thank you for your care and your gracious love toward us. Lord, I just pray right now for anyone who's here in this room who doesn't yet know that in a personal way that you touch them. Help them experience your love and your great power today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Last time when I was with you, we talked about conflict resistant relationships. We're going to continue that today. I want to start by just talking about this idea of a high conflict personality. There are some people, and sometimes you live with them or you work with them. They're all around us. You drive with them. They're people that we come into contact with. There are some people that just have these high conflict personality characteristics. These are things that characterize them. They're all or nothing thinking. It's got to be this way: my way or the highway. They often have unmanaged emotions or they handle them poorly. They have extreme behavior or threats and they're often preoccupied with blaming other people, not taking responsibility for themselves. These are challenges that people have.

Of course they get there from various paths. You can get to that place a lot of different ways. Sometimes it's through an abusive situation or a childhood where you were criticized a lot. Or just through pain in your life that you've experienced. We could all become that except for the grace of God. We don't want to be that person. And so today and last time, we're looking at characteristics of a person. What can I do for myself that would help me to have conflict resistant relationships.

Paul is in a struggle. Actually in the passages that we're looking at in 2 Corinthians, he's actually in a struggle himself. He's in conflict with these people because they're doing things he doesn't think are right. So he's trying to talk to them or confront them through a letter. And we get to read the letter. So in the midst of all of Paul's writing here, we're drawing out some principles about dealing with conflict, and more importantly, being the person who cannot get sucked into that conflict.

So to that end I want to look at part of the passage of our scripture today. This is from 2 Corinthians 12, the end of the passage there. We're actually going to look also in chapter 13 for some principles. But here's what I want you to think about, folks. We're going to read this in just a minute, but I want you to think about your own heart and your own life. I want you to think about how you can set yourself up for being in relationships that don't have a lot of conflict. Because it starts with us. We can't control the other people, but we can control ourselves. So young people, as you're thinking about your life and how you're seeing patterns, I hope that you'll take away some of the things that we're going to talk about today to set yourself up in a godly way so that conflict doesn't dominate your life and all the bad things that happen with it aren't plaguing you.

So would you stand with me? I want to read this passage of scripture. You can look at it in your own Bibles and I'm going to read this passage from 2 Corinthians 12:15-21.

*So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery! Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you? I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not walk in the same footsteps by the same Spirit?*

*Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.*

You may be seated.

In our last time together we started the passages previous to this and we identified three things in Paul's dialogue that we can use for ourselves that we can extract from the passage as principles and then application that can help us deal with conflict better. That is, help us not to deal with a conflicted person, but help us set up relationships so that conflict isn't as present. There are things we can do in our own lives to be people who can resist some of the conflict that would come to us otherwise.

The reason I say that is because there are other people who are magnets for conflict. If it's around it gets to them. There are other people who generate it and they kind of thrive off of conflict. We don't want to be that kind of person. We want to be the kind of person that is able to engage in relationships with as little conflict as possible. Healthy relationships have disagreements, they have conflict, they have differences. But the person who is healthy is a person who is able to deal with those things and the relationship that's healthy is able to deal with the conflict and the differences.

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Now I would suggest healthy is a good word, but I'm going to use the word godly. Because what we want to do is we want to be people who are filled with God's Spirit, who are empowering us to deal with the challenges because they happen in our lives all over the place. I probably don't have to emphasize that too much. You just have to think about your own life and a conflict that exists. What can you do to be a person that is able to manage and address relationships in a way that builds and strengthens.

We looked at three principles last time – admiration (building others up), appreciation (gratefulness), and value people over things. There is a deficit today in our society when it comes to appreciation and admiration. So when we start providing that to people, they just eat it up. Their eyes light up. It's really interesting to be kind to people and care for them. There's just a tremendous need for that. Of course we have something that feeds that in our own lives and that's our relationship with Jesus Christ.

So now let's add to that. We're going to add four more principles to the list today, all from this passage. The first one comes from verse 19. It says in the first part of the verse – *Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you?*

Now there are some people that are defensive. Paul is not being defensive here. He's trying to say I'm not being defensive. I'm just trying to care for you. That's what he's saying. But there are some people who their manipulation that they do... So I've listed some manipulations along the way. There's a fourth one is arguing and being defensive. So when someone is argumentative or they're defensive, they're thinking about protecting themselves. It's a challenge to be able to address someone or work with someone. So how are we going to manage? What are we going to do to not become that kind of a person? That's the question. How am I going to become not arguing and a defensive person in my life? That's the question.

I think the solution that God would have us develop in our own lives as we're trying to work forward is this idea of being edifying. Notice the word build others up is here too. It's obviously in admiration we're building others up. But it's very important that it be here. The word building others up. So that's number four. Be edifying. Build others up. And it comes to the verse.

Let's go back to the verse again and look at it because I've underlined the portion here. Everything we do. I'm going to say that again. *Everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.* The word strengthening there is a word that means to build someone up. That's why it's important to use those words and are aligned. Build someone up. Building someone up.

Now there is a research book that you can use, I use, you can go online now and use it, but you can find the definition of the Greek words. So the word *strengthening* there is a Greek word that's translated. I copied this directly out of the dictionary of the Greek word and I did that because it just hit me. I just got to share with you. So I'm doing my research and my study and my work and every once in a while I come across this nugget and go, "Whoa," and sometimes I just share with you. Here I'm just sharing where I got it. The Lord just touched me with this. Let me read to you what this word strengthening means. It's the word *oikodome*, which figuratively means "constructive criticism and instruction that builds a person up (why?) to be a suitable dwelling place of God where the Lord is at home." Wow.

You know let's think about unsaved people, people who are not yet Christians who are mean and cantankerous. What we want to do is we want to bless them because they are a person that could be inhibited by the Lord if they would accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Or let's think about those people that are brothers and sisters in Christ. All the more so, we need to recognize that God is living in them. So I was thinking this week, when I go into someone else's house, I'm pretty careful about what I do and what I say. That's what we're doing when we're building someone up. We're kind of going into their life and we're saying things that are contributing to this strengthening because that's where God lives. I'm going into God's house.

You see in the New Testament we have this picture of God living in the ark of the covenant or living in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and the Most Holy Place in the temple. That represented the presence of God, where God would come and meet His people. It was just so exciting in Israelite history for God to do that and for them to experience that. But then comes this new covenant. And when we have the new covenant we move away from God living in those places and now where does He live? He lives in our hearts. My heart is Christ's home. So you're home. So it's very important that the words that I say are considerate of being in God's house and the presence of God. It's not just an ordinary person. You and I are the places where God wants to live.

It has so many ramifications for our lives, but I was just struck by that because I want my words to be godly, to build someone up, to be the suitable dwelling place of God. And the things that we say to each other contribute to that suitable place where the Lord is at home. So our comments build someone up so they can experience God's presence. Sometimes it does involve constructive criticism or instruction. So sometimes it's not all warm and fuzzy. Sometimes we have to confront someone.

I just so appreciate it when someone corrects me in a nice way. I need to be corrected and sometimes people don't correct me in such a nice way. I still need to receive it and learn it, but I certainly appreciate it when someone does it in a gracious way. It's much easier for me to grow and to be built up. So this idea of being built up of course is going to be the piece we're going to add to our list of things that are going to help us to move forward in being conflict resistant. Build others up.

Let's go to the very next verse, verse 20. It gives this list of offenses. We can call this the evil eight. There are other passages that have the nasty nine or the terrible ten, but these are the evil eight – *discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder*. I'm looking at those things and I'm saying okay look, when it comes to conflict, certainly those things dominate some people's lives. What's the manipulation that's going on there? Because I tried to put a contrast between the manipulation and the things we need.

I would suggest there is a lot of underhanded communication techniques represented there. Gossip. What's the difference between gossip and slander? Gossip is idle chitchat about something that you're just sharing information that probably you shouldn't be sharing. It's somebody else's business and you're sharing that information. It probably shouldn't be done. But slander is different. Slander has an intent. An intent is not idle. It is an intent to malign

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someone, to put them down, or to make other people think poorly of them. That's the difference between those two. We won't go through all of those. I'm sure you're very familiar with them. Not in yourself, of course, but in the other people that you see and experience.

But let me take one underhanded communication strategy that people use. Let's talk about sarcasm. I know some of you know sarcasm very well. Sarcasm is often used by intelligent people, so you can view yourself as intelligent. Not that that person is wise, but at least they're intelligent. Sarcasm is not wrong. But it has an edge to it that we have to be careful about. Because sarcasm is a statement that we make that has an underlined meaning. Or it wouldn't be sarcasm. If it was a true statement, that's all it would be. But if it's sarcasm, it has this underlying statement that could be a dig.

Let me give you an example just so we all know we're on the same page. If I said, "It's raining. Wow. Great day for a picnic," that's sarcasm. Right? Now there's nothing wrong with that. Maybe I'm just trying to be funny. And somebody laughs, "yeah, yeah, that's right." But if I'm saying that to my wife and she planned a picnic on this day, then we have a problem because maybe my intended message could be, "And what did you plan the picnic on this day for?" So there's this underlying dig that comes in that's dangerous. And even worse, if she and I had had a disagreement about whether we should have a picnic on this day and now I say, "Wow, great day for a picnic," now I'm making a point of "see, you should listen to me. I'm better." Do you see there's an underlying message with sarcasm?

But here's the thing. Sometimes the person who's saying it has no intent to communicate the underlying message. They're just making a joke. Right? But the other person is offended because they hear something like you're making fun of me, or something like that. It's not wrong. It's just dangerous. We have to be careful about sarcasm and the whole list of things that are here.

I would suggest we want to replace it with these things in number five, that we want to have a graciousness about us. That means we're really careful about it, especially when we're right. It's kind of interesting when you're driving that it's very easy for a person who believes they're right to honk their horn. It's just "I'm right and I'm justified to let you have it on the horn." I would suggest that people do that in communication as well. If we're going to have these conflict resistant relationships, we want to be the gracious person that can absorb some of the stuff without reacting and honking the horn every time the other person is wrong and we're right. There's a graciousness, there's a listening that takes place, and then there's confronting graciously with a person constructively so that a person can grow from that. So they take some thought and some work in relationships to have this dynamic that I think is strategic for people to accept and for people to appreciate.

Let's go on and see what else the Lord has for us in this passage. If we go to chapter 13:1, we continue our passage. Paul makes this statement. He says – *This will be my third visit to you. "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."*

The quote "*two of three witnesses*" is an important quote. We'll come back to that in a moment. But let me just bring you back to this statement. What he's saying is I'm coming to you a third time. And that's important that I'm coming to you a third time because I'm saying the same thing

over and over again to you guys. Are you listening to what I'm saying? And then he quotes this quote.

*Two or three witnesses* is something that Jesus said because Jesus gave us a plan for dealing with conflict. What does that plan look like? Well He says if you have a problem with someone, what do you do? You go to the person and you talk to them by yourself. Because if you talk to them maybe you'll win them is the idea. Matthew 18 is where we're getting this quote.

But if that doesn't work... And sometimes it doesn't. A lot of times it does and it just stops right there. But sometimes it doesn't and in that case, He says take someone else with you. He says take someone else with you because when you go with someone else, a lot of things could happen. Sometimes as this person that you're bringing listens to the story, they turn around and they say to you, "You know, I think you're probably taking this a little too far. Maybe you need to back off." So sometimes the person who comes along is able to correct the person who's going. It's not just someone coming along with another shotgun to get this person. It's this person who's wisely coming into the picture to try to bring some understanding, some wisdom into what's happening.

But sometimes you're able to approach this person if the person hears it from a second person their concern, then they're saying, "Oh, maybe this is bigger than I thought and maybe I do need to think about this some more." So this idea of two or three witnesses that you bring is helpful. Here's the idea. If someone tells you that you have a tail, you can ignore them. But if two or three people tell you you have a tail, you probably turn around and look to make sure you don't. Right?

The idea here is that sometimes we believe that we're in the right. There's nothing that can be wrong. So Paul is giving us this very important principle about conflict management that we must keep in mind. That if we're in a difficult situation, it's sometimes hard to know whether we're the problem or the other person is the problem or it's a combination of both. Right? Because we believe we're right and we're offended, so we justify our offense and we don't listen to the other person.

I think what people do in their manipulation often is they avoid conflict or they isolate themselves and there's a certain amount of conflict that's generated just by that. A person who thinks they're getting rid of conflict by avoiding it is missing something because what happens? The conflict tends to fester and get worse because they're not addressing it.

So Paul is saying here I am coming to you a third time. We're going to continue to talk about this. I would suggest that the principle that we want to embrace in our own relationships with others is when things get difficult, get help. When you can, get help. That's what he's saying. So this help is of tremendous value. Sometimes it's just your friend, you're talking and get someone else involved and it just all happens. Other times we get counselors involved. Sometimes we get the police involved or someone else involved in a situation in order to bring some resolution and try to mend. The goal is what? The goal is to bring some unity here. Not just to pounce on the other person. So it's just another idea from the passage that Paul is sharing with us about dealing with and addressing conflict in a godly way.

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Let's go to the fourth verse of 2 Corinthians 13 where it says this: *For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power.* Now if you've been with us through the whole book of 2 Corinthians then the word *power* should stand out for you. I believe it's the key word in the book of 2 Corinthians because it's through this book that we're learning what God's power looks like in a lot of different ways. Today we're playing power to relationships, but when you see that, you go oh, we're back to the theme of the book here. The same thing Paul said so many other times about His power.

Now listen to this last principle that he's going to share right out of the text about relationships because this is really the bottom line. If we could just have this one, forget the other six and go home, we'd be good. Number seven it says: *We are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you.*

Do you realize that every relationship you have is not just two people? It's three. God is present and can be present in every relationship. So if we're thinking about that, then we can say the relationship we have is different with your mom or your dad or your husband or your wife. Or maybe an ex-husband or wife. I mean the problem is difficult. Maybe there's a difficult relationship at work or the people that you work with. It's difficult. But you do not enter into that relationship alone. Paul is illustrating a tremendous principle that we need and that principle is that we rely on God's power. He says *yet by God's power we will live with him our dealing with you.*

It's so rich that in my relationship with my wife or my children or my coworkers or the people that I meet, I want to live with God in my relationship with those people. I want to honor God in the way that I treat these people or respond to them. It's about God's power in me. And that ties us back into this whole theme about how big God's power is and how we're weak. We do the t-shirts. There's t-shirts if you didn't get one. They're out there. "I'm weak, but I'm experiencing the power of God." Because we recognize that. Do you see that right there? *We are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you.* Weak and strong.

The problem with is that people who use the manipulative strategies to address things, although they are weak, they want to appear strong. So these are manipulative techniques that put others down or that yell or trying to get the upper hand in one way or another so that they can protect themselves. The alternative is to recognize or to admit that you're weak. A lot of people don't like to do that. A relationship is so important and people often find their gratification in putting people down, and that's a really hard thing for us to be able to address.

How are we going to be in that relationship? I would just suggest we don't want to become that person here who's the challenge. If you live with someone (I don't mean live in the home but live in a working relationship) or you're in some continual contact with a high conflict personality, there's a big danger here. The danger is that it will transfer to you. Because you then can start picking up this high conflict way of working with people and start defending yourself and using those same strategies in order to get the upper hand and it's damaging. Not just damaging to the relationship, it's damaging to you as a person.

So how are you going to handle that? What are you going to do? I want to suggest that it's really hard. There's sometimes that people say I just can't give anymore than I'm giving, I can't do this.

I talked to a mom over the weekend here who said, "I just don't think I have what it takes to be the mom of these kids. I just can't do this anymore." My response is you're what they have. God can give you the strength to do what you need to do and be able to work with these children in a very difficult situation. Because you've got to realize, there are a lot of kids who are high conflict personalities. They're the ones who don't admit that they're wrong, they blame problems on other people, they have emotions that are out of control, they're threatening. They're the people that we live with sometimes that are really challenging.

We were at a conference this weekend, Carrie and me, and Ed and Joanne. We were working at the parenting booth there, and Ed turned around and says, "Three people here, I start talking to them, they start crying just in the last few minutes." Because there's such a message of hope that people need today. And who has the answers for this? Of course we do. We know the power of God. We know what that looks like. People need that and encouragement that we can bring.

Let me just show you one more verse of scripture that I just think is very helpful. It's this one from... Okay let's finish talking about this. Arrogance and self-centeredness is the manipulation and the solution is to rely on God's power in relationships. Here's the verse from Proverbs 11:25 – *A generous man will prosper. So the idea has to do with generosity, but it's the next part of the verse that I'm most interested in. It says – he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.*

There are times when you're going to say, "I just don't have anymore to give. I don't know what to do. I don't have it." I want you to know in that moment, that's where faith takes over. We don't live by sight; we live by faith. So it's at that moment that we say okay, I'm going to encourage someone. And what happens? God turns that around and He blesses us in the midst of that. We start doing the right thing. That doesn't mean that the situation works out, but we enjoy the blessing of God because remember there's three people in this relationship. It's me and this other person and it's the Lord.

There's sometimes when I'm trying to do the right thing, but I'm still getting mistreated by the other person and I find my consolation not in winning an argument or even winning the other person; my consolation is that I'm pleasing the Lord in the midst of that. It's the faith that I enter into in that moment that allows me to be a refreshment to others.

When you start refreshing others, you never know how they're going to respond. Many people will respond poorly. A lot of people will respond well when you refresh them. It's a great gift that we give people to refresh them. We refresh them with a goal in mind. Really there's an ultimate goal to introduce them to Jesus, to have them understand who God is and we represent God as we're refreshing other people and maybe we'll have a conversation. Maybe we'll lead to something significant, and it often does. As you start refreshing someone and engage the conversation and then you're able to share more about who you are and what you stand for.



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I'll close with a statement that I think is a take-away for me as I come from this passage. If we're going to be conflict resistant, rather than seeing differences, disagreement, or conflict as an assault on our identity, we look at it as an opportunity to put your identity into practice. Wow. It's a different way of thinking about conflict and disagreement and differences. This is an opportunity for me to practice my identity in Christ, to live with God, as Paul says, to live with God as I'm relating to you. God wants to do big things, I think, in our own hearts.

So I suppose we could have a sermon all about how to deal with these conflicted people that are all around us all the time, but it seems that the message that Paul is trying to communicate to us is how not to be that person and how we ourselves can be that gracious person relying on the power of God, living the walk of faith in the midst of relationship. I just want to say that if you're in a conflicted relationship, I would encourage you to try to be godly as much as you can, but if you're stuck, get help. Get help from the fellow brothers and sisters to pray for you or even give you advice or even get someone else involved that can help you. You do not have to live in conflicted relationships alone. There's help available and God has provided the church as a piece of that help that's available to you in your own life.

Can we pray together please?

[PRAYER] Lord, relationships are so important in all of our lives. Family relationships are right at the top of things that have influenced us and changed us. So I pray right now for each of us as we relate to those people in our lives that are closest to us or we have to interact with regularly. I pray that you would provide hope in our own hearts, that we can find strength in our relationship with you. And then I pray that you would use our relationship with you to empower us to refresh other people. Lord, we know there's such a deficit in our world. People are longing for refreshment. We know ultimately that as coming to know you as a personal Savior. I pray, Lord, in the midst of where we are right now, as we just are encouraging to other people, we would be able to live out our identity. So I ask for a special blessing on each person here, a special measure for your grace to deal with the challenges that we all face. In Jesus' name, amen.