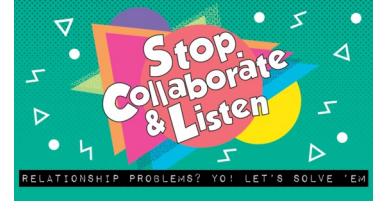


DISCUSSION GUIDE :: WEEK 1

STOP, COLLABORATE & LISTEN
ONLY GOD CAN SOLVE THE RUBIK'S CUBE OF RELATIONSHIPS
MARK 10:35-45, PROVERBS 22:24-25, COLOSSIANS 4:6
09/10/2017



MAIN POINT

Relationship problems are solved through God's grace, not through anger.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is one thing people do that really pushes your button?

Everyone gets angry from time to time. When you do, are you more likely to act out in your anger, or sit on it and stew?

Certain things in life trigger angry reactions in us, whether we like it or not. Maybe you get angry when people talk in movies, or when your children tell you no, or maybe it's something more serious. Regardless of the circumstances, there is no excuse for our anger. The Bible clearly states that it is a sin unless it is the righteous anger that seeks to uphold God's glory (like Jesus displayed in the temple). People tend to respond to anger in one of two ways—they power up or power down. Regardless of which camp you fall into, anger is a very real issue we all deal with. Thankfully, God's Word provides guidance for believers to deal with their anger in a God-honoring way.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MARK 10:35-45.

The brothers James and John asked Jesus for a special favor. What was it?

What do you think prompted their request? Why do you think it was important for James and John to know whether they could have the seats of honor in Jesus' kingdom?

Power struggles like this one often creep into our relationships. What are power struggles really about?

James and John asked for the places on Jesus' right and left in His glory. In Jewish culture, the seat to the right of a king represented the place of highest honor. The next best place was on the left. The two disciples requested the positions of highest recognition for themselves. The request reveals the true hearts of James and John. They expressed a selfish

concern for personal greatness. This desire exposed their shallow, short-sighted spirits. Christians today struggle with the same issues the disciples did. We tend to measure our worth by the honors we gather or positions we hold, and this creates power struggles and tensions in our relationships. God does not share that perspective. He determines your greatness based on your willingness to practice self-sacrifice after the pattern of Jesus. How you serve other people matters to Him.

Read verse 41 again and note how the other disciples responded to James and John's request. Why would this have angered them?

What does Jesus' response to all of the disciples—those who asked for power and those who got angry at the request—teach us about relationships?

In these verses, Jesus shows us how God's view of relationships differs directly from that of the world. Jesus called for leadership from the bottom up instead of from the top down. The life of Christ is one of service, as He Himself modeled for us. He said those who want to be first or great, do so by becoming a slave. Believers serve at God's direction and work to advance His cause, rather than serve out of their own motives. Throughout His ministry, Jesus modeled humble service to others without any attempt to lift up Himself. Furthermore, Jesus willingly offered up His life to set people free from the devastation of sin. Thus, through self-sacrificial service, Jesus advanced the lives of others. If we hope to glorify God in our relationships, we have to work to put others before ourselves. No one wins in a power struggle.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PROVERBS 22:24-25.

From this proverb, what is the warning for us about anger and the issues it presents in relationships?

The writer of this proverb reminds us that anger passes easily from one person to the next. What changes when you view anger as the enemy, not the other person?

As the writer of this proverb notes, anger is a powerful emotion. The warning to avoid being friends with "a hot-tempered man" says more about the power of anger than it does the angry person. Another person's anger can cause anger can easily rise up in us as well. Whether you usually respond to another person's anger with your own or by backing away completely, neither response is healthy. The better approach is to remember that anger is your enemy, not the other person. Walk away, take a break, sit down . . . do whatever you need to do in order to not let anger win.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ COLOSSIANS 4:6.

This verse comes from a section of Colossians where Paul gave practical insight into how to share the gospel with others. However, the truth of Colossians 4:6 resonates well beyond gospel conversations into every conversation we have.

What does it mean to have conversations that are "full of grace" and "seasoned with salt"? Describe some specific traits that would characterize this type of speech.

Why is this type of speech honoring to God?

How do conversations flavored with grace help us actively fight back against the power and anger struggles of relationships?

Paul knew that believers in Colossae would encounter people of various types whose responses and questions would differ. Christians were to be prepared to fit their words to each person who asked about Christ and various elements of the gospel. Because we belong to Christ, we are to exercise wisdom in how we behave. We must know what Christ

expects of us, and our conduct must reflect our determination to live according to His standards. Giving grace in a conversation, whether about the gospel or not, helps to preserve the relationship, gives the other person the benefit of the doubt, and shows you value that person more than winning the argument.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

From the three Scripture passages we looked at today, what is the key takeaway for you when it comes to navigating relationship problems like power struggles and anger?

In which situations or relationships is it easiest for you to use graceful speech? In which situations or relationships is it most challenging? What immediate step do you need to make toward more God-honoring, graceful speech?

As a group, how can we hold one another accountable to choose grace over anger?

PRAY

Relationships bring challenges, but thankfully we serve a God who can solve them. Spend time in prayer thanking God for the wisdom of His Word and asking for His grace to permeate your conversations in the week ahead.

COMMENTARY

MARK 10:35-45

10:35. The insensitivity of James and John in this verse prefigures the insensitivity of the three disciples in the garden of Gethsemane when they could not stay awake while Jesus was in great agony. It is clear from their words that they did not recognize that Jesus would die; they were expecting him to inherit his kingdom. Some interpreters believe they spoke from faith, because they believed Jesus would die but would overcome through his resurrection. In this case, they wanted to be a part of his kingdom when he came back victoriously. This interpretation does not fit with the rest of Mark's Gospel or with the general disbelief of the disciples.

10:36-37. Jesus, however, did not rebuke them, but invited them to tell him the desires of their hearts. They were asking for seats of high honor, ruling positions. Although they believed that Jesus would eventually conquer, they misunderstood what kind of kingdom Jesus had come to establish through his suffering and death. To balance this, however, we must remember that James and John loved Jesus and were loyal to him. Although they misunderstood his words, at least they promised they would be with him.

10:38. Again, Jesus did not rebuke them, perhaps because he knew of their love for him. But Jesus asked them if they were prepared to suffer as he would suffer. Jesus asked them, as he asks all disciples, to count the cost (cf. Luke 14:27-33). In the Old Testament, "the cup" signified divine judgment on sin. By "his cup," Jesus was probably referring to the divine judgment poured out on him on behalf of all humanity. This phrase further points out the disciples' lack of understanding.

10:39-40. Whether or not they knew what they agreed to, Jesus told James and John they would share his sufferings. James was martyred when he was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2), thus becoming the first apostle to be martyred. Although tradition says that John was the only apostle not to be martyred, he was persecuted for Christ and eventually died in exile on the island of Patmos. Jesus' reply that their request was not his to grant shows his reverent submission to his Father. In all matters, he submitted to his Father's will.

10:41. Mark's statement about the other disciples that they became indignant is an obvious understatement. Their anger and resentment was probably not because of their concern for the Lord. They were probably thinking of their own positions. How did the other disciples hear about this incident? Did James and John tell the others? Were they overheard? Did Salome brag to others in the group that her sons would receive special privilege? While all these may be

possible, the Bible does not specify how they knew.

10:42-44. Jesus called the disciples together. They had been with many other people, but Jesus pulled them away to teach them, as he had done so often in the past. This act reminded them that they were to live in unity. His words underscored the need for this. A good example of Gentile lordship can be found in Daniel 4. King Nebuchadnezzar believed that his kingship gave him the right to claim the status of God: "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" (v. 30). God took away his authority and he lived as an animal, "until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes" (v. 25).

This is why God did not want King David to take a census (2 Sam. 24:1-17). God wanted his ruler, the shepherd placed over the sheep, to put his trust in God, not in the number of warriors. Such things are characteristic of unbelievers. At the time of Jesus, Gentile lords (such as the Caesars) loved to equate themselves with gods. They placed their likenesses on coins to remind people of their self-proclaimed divinity. They did not rule their subjects with benevolence, but they required them to bow down and worship them. Do not be like these Gentiles, Jesus told his disciples. He repeated essentially what he had been saying for the last two chapters of Mark: To be great, you must serve.

10:45. In this verse, Jesus delivered the stunning summary of all his teaching on servanthood in the Gospel of Mark. He gave the disciples the supreme example of servanthood: himself. And they had seen him serve. They had seen him touch the unclean. They had seen him heal the multitudes. They had seen him feed thousands. Before it was over, they would see him wash the grime from their feet. They had seen the only one who truly deserved to be called "Lord" place himself in humble service to others.

If we remember where Jesus came from, we can see how absurd this must have sounded to them. Jesus had ten thousand angels at his disposal. He was the Creator of everything that exists. He was in eternal fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He shared their glory and splendor. And yet he gave it all up and was born in a stable to a poor teenager in order to draw all people to God.

PROVERBS 22:24-25

A hot-tempered man is constantly in trouble (15:18; 19:19; 29:22); his companion could get trapped (12:13; 18:7; 29:6).

COLOSSIANS 4:6

For the sharing of the message of Christ to be effective, the wise walk must be accompanied with flavorful talk. The believer's talk is to be gracious, rather than gruff, and charming, rather than coarse. The believer's talk is to be seasoned with salt. Salt was used for two purposes in Paul's time. It was used as a preservative to keep food from spoiling. This would mean the believer's speech is to be free from corruption, wholesome. Salt was also used as an additive to give flavor to food. If this meaning lies behind the figure, then the believer's speech is to be interesting, witty, tactful, and appealing. Perhaps the best understanding of the reference to salt is that the believer's speech is to be both wholesome and appealing. Paul wants believers to know how to answer everyone. He tells them to answer with speech which is gracious, wholesome, and appealing.