

Logging Made Easy

Number two in the series: *Make Peace Not War*
Biblical tools for handling conflict
January 9 & 10, 2010

Intro:

You may wonder why I've brought an axe up here today.

I want to be particularly persuasive. I'm talking about money.

No, it's a manliness thing - you know - the lumberjack look. You see, I accompanied my wife shopping just before Christmas and we talked about sewing and quilting. We even went into Bath and Bodyworks to smell hand lotions. I didn't try any! This is part of my masculinity recovery program.

No, that's not it either! The axe is a *visual aid*. This new series of messages is about *how to handle conflict*. Today my title is *Logging Made Easy* and my main text is **Matt 7:3-5** "Why do you look at the speck of saw-dust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

When someone has a splinter in his or her eye; that can be a painful problem. They need help. But ignoring a log in your own eye is an even *bigger problem* and hinders your ability to help anyone else.

Let me tell you where I'm going: *When you approach conflict with an axe to grind, it's natural to come out swinging. But before you have that talk with that person, sit down and have a little talk with yourself. Begin with this question:*

1. Is there a log obstructing my view that I must deal with first? *Is there something obvious that I*

must address before I can be of any help correcting someone else? When you notice something wrong with someone you want to jump in and correct the problem. Jesus said, **First take the plank out of your own eye!** He's using hyperbole. It's hard to imagine something as big as a log in your eye. The illustration is contrasting *the relative size of the problems*.

Two more contrasts also come to mind: *how obvious the problem is* and *how much easier it is to remove*. When there's a log in your eye, everyone can see it; it's not hard to locate - in fact, it is hard not to notice, at least for others.

Jesus was talking to Pharisees. Their issue was self-righteousness - that was *the huge log* that disqualified them from providing helpful correction. Instead they judged according to legalistic standards and offered *condemnation*, not corrective help. We don't want to be like them, that's why we need to ask ourselves, *is there a log obstructing my view that I must deal with first?*

T - I'll break this big question into a few manageable pieces so we can get our minds around this material. When you are experiencing relational problems, ask yourself...

oWhat is my part in this conflict? *What part of this is my fault? Am I really the innocent victim?* Most people who play this role are neither *innocent nor the victim*.

People who *level the axe* on others may be thinking of themselves as *standing above* the people they correct. **1 Cor 10:12 - If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.** Are you really so different?

Ask, *am I just the recipient of the hurt, or might I be the perpetrator to some extent? What can I own? What would an objective observer say? Am I being a jerk?* It is easy to think inaccurately about yourself. **Rom 12:3 - Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.**

S - Jesus says that if you feel motivated to start prying into someone's life after something relatively small, you will want to deal with your own obvious issue first.

T - Once you realize you may have an issue or two yourself, you have to ask:

oHow do my faults come into play? I've identified two classic problems with trying to correct someone else before you take care of the obvious problem you have:

When we deny the obvious, clarity is blocked by subjectivity. Jesus asked, *how can you see clearly enough to dab a little speck out of someone's eye if you still have a piece of timber in your own?* You've got to take care of that. Why? Our own problems blind us. When we pretend that we've perfect, failing to deal with the obvious, then we can't see clearly to help the other person. Before you start correcting someone else, examine your own heart: Gal 6:1 - Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. *This doesn't mean you can't confront anyone unless you're perfect - the context is about walking in the Spirit.* The point is to rely on God. When we do, accepting and acting on the truth, we can *be objective enough to see clearly.*

T - Another classic way our faults come into play is that...

When we neglect responsibilities, credibility is eclipsed by hypocrisy. When we don't deal with our own weaknesses, no one will take us seriously when we try to fix their issues. The guy with the splinter in his eye is hurting. He needs help. But when your life is a bundle of contradictions, he isn't exactly taking notes when you begin to lecture him. Rom 2:1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Unfortunately, it is common to see this pattern in the home. Parents nit-pick their kids about things but lack the consistency in their own lives to set a reliable pattern to

follow. This makes me think of what Jesus said, Mark 7:6 - Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." It is up to us to follow Christ so closely that our kids don't echo those words about us.

T - So, we are considering the importance of dealing with the logs in our own lives before trying to correct others. If *something specific* comes to your mind, you may be asking...

oWhat should I do about how I've contributed to this conflict? Take *100% responsibility* for *whatever portion of the problem you can own.* I've got two unpopular words for you:

Confess: Jesus said that the truth sets you free! To confess is to fully admit what is true 1 Jn 1:9. The verses on both sides of that one remind us that we are not perfect. No one has it all together (Rom 3:23 - We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.)

Don't let a fear of failure keep you from admitting your faults. Failure is not when someone realizes you have weaknesses, but when you push people away pretending that you don't have any. The pride behind such insecurity will sabotage your ability to handle conflict.

We don't only confess our failings to God. James 5:16 - Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other. Don't worry about exposing your failings. Others can already see your faults just fine; *they're wondering if you do!* You can be transparent about your issues because they are already in plain view. For you to remain in denial just looks silly. I'm not talking about broadcasting your every sin, but there are some things you need to admit to God and to others. Can you think of some right now?

Repent. To *repent* is to *fully turn from sin to God.* You see, recognizing your errors is only half of it. We still need to leave them behind. In Acts 26:20 Paul summarizes the content of his message, saying that people should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

Understanding these principles isn't enough, we need to apply them. You know the right way, now walk in it. **Is. 48:18** *If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.* I don't want you to have to say *if only I had approached the conflict according to God's instructions*. It's time to really follow through and to experience his peace!

T - I come now to the second major question to ask yourself before confronting others about their problems.

2. Is slash and burn clearcutting really the

method to use? At a church workday, I was trimming bushes in the back and came around front to see that *Pastor John had taken on a management role* in the weeding of the groundcover between our buildings. He was leading his team to *mercilessly rip it all out!* They were *clear-cutting* the place down to bare ground! I guess *that was* the right method *there*, but weeders were being more selective elsewhere. Different problems call for different solutions. *By the way, John wasn't sweating, but his team sure was!* He gave me permission to mention this, saying, *"I've been called a slave driver before and probably will be again."* He also included a biblical reference, likening himself to Pharaoh who ordered the children of Israel to make bricks without straw! *So, be sure to come on out to our next workday...*

S - My point here is that we need to consider not only our hearts, but also our methods.

T - Again I'll but my big question into smaller bites. Ask:

oIs this the right hill? There's a saying, *Choose carefully the hill upon which you make your stand*. It's a military idea:

If you engage in every battle, you'll lose the important ones. Years ago, a conservative friend of ours explained why she didn't blow up when her son had a lightning bolt shaved

into his scalp: *Why sweat the small stuff*. Point: be selective. Don't react to everything. *Some* things can be ignored.

Prov. 19:11 - *A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.* *Do I have to swing at this pitch, or can I brush it off?* Love empowers us to let go of some things we've been holding. **1 Peter 4:8** - *love covers over a multitude of sins.* **1 Cor 6:7** - *better to be wronged.*

Another friend of ours used to refer to *optional stress*. She used this term as a reminder that you don't have to flip out about everything. There are enough truly heavy things in life. Maybe we can *lighten up* about other things.

How can I relax? Here's a prayer: **Is. 26:3** - *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.* Verse after verse depict God as the source of wisdom and strength to handle conflict well.

oIs this the right time and place for cutting? *Is this the right time for something drastic; is this the right place for something private?* **11:12** - *A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue.* *Public correction leads only to shame.* *Is that your aim?* Do you want to *get back* at the person? If so, a *public cut* is the technique. But *if you want to help, you may have to wait*. Don't just jump into it; get together alone and sit and listen. **Prov. 18:2** - *A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.* Make sure you know the facts. **12:16** - *A fool shows his annoyance at once...* **17:27** *A man of knowledge uses words with restraint....*

oAm I the right person for this job? *Am I the right person to deliver this message? Why me? Why not me?* Don't be intimidated and cop out. God may want to use you. *Can you be of help? Is this something first hand?* The pattern in **Matt 18** starts this way **15** - *If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.* If the offense was against you, then *you're involved*.

Your choices are *to overlook it* or *to address it*, but not *to wallow in bitterness* or *engage in gossip*. We'll come back to this in the series.

ols my strength inadequate? We've always used a woodburning stove as our primary heat. I used to grow eucalyptus for firewood. They grew quickly so I planted hundreds of them over the years. It was easy to cut and split the wood, *unless the tree had dried out*. If it had been dead long, it would *get so hard* that I could *barely get my saw through it*. It seemed like it *turned to rock* and became impossible to split. I would swing and sweat and fail. I remember having to walk away from some logs.

It may be that you find certain people so hard that you can't do much with them *or for them*. The Bible warns us of this sad reality. There is a kind of person who refuses to change. *Don't show me a better way. 12:15 - The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.*

Maybe this sad verse is describing a loved one. **Prov. 13:1** *A wise son accepts his father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.* There will be people who are not receptive to your message. The Scripture says you're wasting your words in such situations. They don't want correction. Only God can get open them up. *Your strength is inadequate!* But God can do what we cannot do. He is able.

Concl: These questions are designed to help us clarify the issues, but we've considered so many that you may be reeling from the *complexity* of the situation. Fortunately we have a *simple* promise from the book of **James 1:1-5** - troubles in life cause you to grow. If you're not sure how to handle these conflicts, we have a resource: *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

When we don't know what to do, we can ask God for wisdom and he'll give it. Right after using the logging

illustration, Jesus encouraged his followers to pray, trusting in God's goodness (**Matt 7:7-11**).

So let that be the application today. If these questions are rattling around in your brain, then it is time to ask the Lord for some clarity for the confusion.

If God has used this message to bring *conviction*, then it is time to repent and say, *God, I want to confess that I've been a creep and I need the courage to ask for forgiveness from the people I've been offending.*

If you have come to come to a place where you realize you have a power shortage then tell God about that. *I don't have love in my heart, I need a new start...*

Prayer