



Gratefully “Serving” into Conflict

This article provided by
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“A dispute arose among them...” (Luke 22:24).

With these few words, the seriousness and significance of Christ’s purpose in this upper room gathering is lost. Christ has vulnerably spoken of His impending betrayal and death like never before saying, **“This is My body that is broken for you; take and eat. This is My blood that is shed for you; take and drink.”**

Imagine the Master’s sense of disappointment and sadness that these whom He has poured His life into are—at His most needful time—distracted into conflict.

Such is the nature of conflict. It distracts from the seriousness and significance of Christ’s purpose for the hour. Only the thief who seeks to steal and destroy is a victor when we become distracted in conflict (see John 10:10).

Conflict entangles a widening spiral of innocent bystanders as friends are challenged to take sides in the conflict between warring factions. It scars the weaker brethren, leaving behind bitterness long after the conflict, and prompts fear that life is not truly a safe place. In a most needful hour, the testimony of unifying love to an unbelieving world is lost—often irreparably so—for families, friends, and entire communities wounded by dispute.



Conflict—The Irony of It

Disputing disciples—the words don't seem to go together. How ironic that in this scene from Luke 22, it is James and John, two of the inner circle, who are in dispute. Seemingly, those closest to leadership are the ones who often lead out in conflict! Ironically, those chosen to lead, entrusted with privilege, battle against others instead of against "spiritual wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12). The final irony in our disputes with one another is the picture of a warring body. Imagine your hand viciously attacking another part of your body, hitting yourself in the chest or stomach. Do that a few times, and people will begin to keep their distance, judging you as unsafe, unstable, and even worse! Let His church boil with conflict, one member of Christ's body attacking another, and it won't be long until many others, both believers and unbelievers, will keep their distance from such an unsafe place.

Conflict—A Prescription for Healing

Additionally significant in the conflict of James and John is how inevitably close it is to you and me. If John, the beloved, and James his brother, can be snared into conflict under the Master's watchful care, so can we. Yet, we can take hope that God has not left us without instruction, but rather He has given us His word that by it we might find healing and freedom. Human relationships—whether in families, among friends, within communities, or inside the church—inevitably bring hurt, disappointment, and misunderstanding. Experiencing God's Word keeps relationships healthy and gives evidence of divine grace and the Spirit's presence.

At times, I will be prompted by His Spirit to confess my faults (James 5:16) to someone. It might sound like, "I regret I was impatient and insensitive toward you last time we were together; it was very wrong of me. Will you forgive me?" How long has it been since you shared such a heartfelt apology? Maybe that's too long. **Pause, asking the Holy Spirit to search your heart, allow Him to bring someone to mind who needs to hear the "godly sorrow" of your confession (2 Corinthians 7:10–12).**

A second discipline, which brings healing to inevitable conflicts, is the grace of forgiveness. Relationships inevitably mean that each of us will be challenged to experience the power and freedom of **"forgiving one another as we have been forgiven by Christ" (Ephesians 4:32)**. Failing to forgive lets the sun go down on anger and disputes surely follow. Paul speaks of "putting away anger...becoming kind, tenderhearted." (4:32–32). Anger and unforgiveness quench kindness and make tender hearts grow cold. Pause and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to whom you are not showing kindness. Towards whom have you grown cold-hearted? Now comes the choice and miracle of forgiveness. Listen quietly as the Spirit speaks to you saying, **"Will you share with this person some of My forgiveness which I have given you?"** Listen again to the question. It is God's forgiveness, which by His grace, He has put within you. It's not yours! As a good steward of divine grace, will you share some of this unmerited favor of forgiveness with another?

Such are the challenges and potentials of healthy relationships. Practicing the disciplines of confession and forgiveness helps us experience yet another Bible verse, **"As far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18).**



Conflict—Guarding Our Homes and Communities from It

"I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). In contrast to the disciples' focus on fighting for "greatness," Christ now lives before them the secret to true greatness and to harmony in relationships. He girds himself with a towel and begins to wash their feet. We should note that the disciples had missed the opportunity to serve the Master in this way, and we soon find them in dispute. **Could it be that we are guarded from the distraction of dispute by a servant's heart?** Christ's work and example speak loudly to such a truth. A servant's heart keeps us focused on the needs of others, while the distraction of dispute begins its journey with the shift in focus to oneself. *"The greatest among you shall be the servant of all" (Matthew 23:11).*

10 simple ways to "serve" your neighbor in light of COVID-19:

1. **Shop local:** (especially with those who may have been caught in community protests/violence). Call local businesses and restaurants to ask whether they're open, and how you can (safely) support them. Order delivery, merchandise, or a gift card online for future use.
2. **Give blood:** Blood drives across the country have been canceled, and the American Red Cross is reporting a severe shortage of blood. Contact your local Red Cross and find a location to donate.
3. **Support the people that serve you:** Go ahead and send an online payment to your hairdresser, babysitter, dance teacher, or anyone who regularly serves you or might suddenly be out of work. A little donation goes a long way and communicates a caring heart.
4. **Support your local food bank:** With schools closed, many children go hungry without their normal school breakfasts or lunches. Contact your food bank or other hunger assistance program to see how you can help.
5. **Support your local homeless shelter:** The homeless are especially vulnerable with no place to quarantine and no way to practice good hygiene. Contact shelters or homeless ministries to donate money or drop off supplies.
6. **Call someone (especially "outside" your comfort zone) just to check-in.** Being in isolation is especially hard for those who live alone and might feel cutoff. Even a 15-minute FaceTime call can help a neighbor feel connected and loved.
7. **Write a letter:** Grab some stationary and write letters to neighbors, loved ones, senior homes, hospitals, community leaders, and police officers! A note of encouragement can go a long way to ease loneliness and worry.
8. **Don't complain:** Refrain from complaining about the things we have to give up in this season while people in the world suffer. This is our moment to SERVE others with the voice of faith, hope, and love—especially on social media.
9. **Speak faith:** In the face of panic, Christians have the unique opportunity to speak peace. Email a verse or call/ text a neighbor to ask if you can pray for them. God's Word will not return void.
10. **Look and listen for conflicted parties,** avoid taking sides, and then find creative ways to serve BOTH!

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