

Peacemaking in the Local Church

This talk reflects on how Christian communities can become better peacemakers by learning to engage conflict in healthy ways rather than avoiding it.

The speaker begins with a childhood story of monthly “family beef nights,” where family members openly discussed grievances around the table. While the conversations were often emotional and messy, they created relief and honesty by bringing tensions into the open. This experience raises a question for churches: *Do our faith communities create space to address conflict honestly?* If Christians are called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), they must first acknowledge that conflict is real and unavoidable. Rather than assuming conflict should not exist in churches, believers need to increase their capacity to handle tension, disagreement, and relational complexity.

The speaker proposes three key shifts for healthier conflict engagement in churches and organizations:

1. **From “just get it over with” to “holding the tension with purpose.”**

Many conflicts escalate because people rush to quick solutions or avoid the issue altogether. This “get it over with” mindset often ignores deeper problems, causing them to resurface later. Instead, peacemakers learn to stay in the tension long enough to understand what is really happening. Scripture provides examples of this in Joshua 22, where Israel investigates an altar before going to war, and Acts 15, where early church leaders carefully deliberate the issue of circumcision for Gentile believers. Holding tension allows people to gain perspective, prevent damage, and strengthen relationships.

The speaker introduces a practical framework called “conflict agility”:

- **Pause** – slow down and interrupt reactive responses.
- **Go in** – reflect on what is happening internally (emotions, assumptions, reactions).
- **Go up** – examine the broader context and systems involved.
- **Go out** – choose a thoughtful action rather than a reactive one.

2. **From “having the answer” to “initiating a process of discovery.”**

Leaders often feel pressured to provide quick solutions, but many conflicts are too complex for simple answers. Instead of rushing to judgment, leaders should guide a process of discernment through questions, dialogue, listening, and Scripture. Asking questions such as “*Who needs to be involved?*” or “*What are we missing?*” helps communities understand the issue more fully. This process may take longer but leads to better outcomes and greater trust, because people feel heard and included.

3. **From “seeing people as the problem” to “understanding the problems people are experiencing.”**

In conflict, communities often label individuals as the problem (“they’re angry,” “they’re difficult”). This approach creates scapegoats and prevents real solutions. Instead, peacemakers separate the person from the issue. By identifying concrete problems—such as poor communication or lack of accountability—leaders can address the issue while still treating people with dignity. This approach allows for accountability, forgiveness, growth, and redemption.

The talk concludes by emphasizing that peacemaking begins with individual discipleship practices. Christians develop “**peacemaking muscles**” by leaning into tension rather than avoiding it. Jesus modeled this by holding tension, asking questions, and addressing the deeper issues beneath people’s behavior. When churches adopt these practices—holding tension, seeking discovery, and focusing on problems rather than people—they create communities where truth, healing, and transformation can occur.

Discussion Questions (30–45 Minutes)

1. The speaker shared about her family’s “beef nights,” where conflicts were openly discussed. How does your family or church typically deal with conflict—address it openly, avoid it, or something in between?
2. Why do you think conflict is often harder to address in church communities than in other settings?
3. What do you think are the benefits and challenges of addressing conflict openly (see Proverbs 15³¹⁻³²; 27⁵⁻⁶; James 3¹³⁻¹⁸)?
4. Jesus calls his followers to be peacemakers (Matthew 5⁹). What is the difference between being a *peacemaker* and simply avoiding conflict? What examples of each have you seen or experienced?
5. The speaker suggests that instead of rushing to resolve conflict, we should “**hold the tension with purpose.**” (see Joshua 22⁹⁻³³) Why do people often try to resolve conflict too quickly? What is required to “hold the tension with purpose”?
6. Which step of the **conflict agility process** (pause, go in, go up, go out) do you think is most difficult for people? For yourself? Why?
7. In the talk, leaders are encouraged to **ask questions and guide discovery** instead of immediately giving answers. How might asking better questions improve the way conflicts are handled?
8. The speaker says we should move from **seeing people as the problem** to **understanding the problems people are experiencing**. How might this change the way we approach disagreements?
9. The speaker compared conflict skills to athletic training. What practices might help a church develop stronger “peacemaking muscles”?
10. Think about a conflict you have experienced in a church, family, or workplace. How might one of the principles in today’s talk have helped improve that situation?
11. What is one practical step you could take to become a **better peacemaker** in your relationships this week?