

- Introduction

- Context

**On Easter Day we talked about God's plan for peace.** Easter is God's plan for peace. Sending his own son to die for the sins of the world. That's the plan for peace. But the next question is, well what impact does that have? If I have conflict at home, at work. If I see conflict on the news every night. Where does God's peace spill over into everyday life? Into the actual conflicts that I'm part of? **That's the next 3 weeks.** We're going to cover 3 big areas of conflict where we struggle to know what to do, how to think about conflict. And we're going to explore some biblical wisdom and practical skills that help us to find peace in the midst of our conflicts. So today, peace at home. Next Sunday, peace at work. And on ANZAC Sunday, War & Peace.

**And this is an important area for us to explore,** because most of us not good at conflict. We either run away and hide, or we ball our fists and fight. And this series is going to help us see a whole bunch of options in between. It's also important because conflict eats away at our relationships. And relationships are what life is all about. Relationship with God. Relationship with each other. So if we're not at peace in our relationships, we can't enjoy them. We can't flourish in our relationships. So this is a great practical series for us to let the peace of God shape everyday life.

- Blurp

- Bible is full of wisdom - how to live life practically under God

**So what wisdom does the Bible offer us when it comes to finding peace at home?** Two kinds of biblical wisdom. Firstly, general wisdom. The Bible says God has given us an orderly world. There are patterns of life, ways of living, that give good predictable results. That let us flourish. Including in the household. One famous book that includes a lot of general wisdom is the book of **Proverbs**. And that was our first reading today. Let's have a look...

- Including household wisdom

**Proverbs 15v13.** A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit. This is a classic Hebrew way of giving you both sides of the same coin. And it's common sense. But it's a helpful reminder that that when we talk about conflict, we're not just talking about the conflict itself, the merit of the arguments. We're talking about the heart. The people. The relationship. And if we really want to be happy, then we don't just want resolved conflicts, we want reconciled relationships.

**Now the verses go on,** and they're kind of like bullet points, each one stands alone. But they're also cumulative. So v14 says if you've got the heart-ache, then get help. Get knowledge. Get some tools, get some skills. Don't just keep banging away with the same old approach to conflict that don't work. That's foolish. And v15: If you don't, you're condemning yourself to long-term hardship. And you're missing the chance for long-term blessing. But if you can restore the heart, you'll have long-term blessing.

**Now the key verses for today are v16 & 17.** Because these ones are directed at households. They bring heart-ache and conflict into the home environment. So v16: It would be better to live in poverty than to have great wealth and turmoil. And v17: It would be better to live on vegetables than to home full of hatred. And that's the relationships thing. Life is not all about money. Life is not all about food. Life is all about relationships. Home-life is all about relationships. Some of us live alone, but at some point most of us live with flatmates or family. And the quality of our home life will be measured in terms of our relationships and our conflicts.

**So a good piece of general wisdom, don't need to be a Christian,** is that you want the tools and skills and habits and presence of mind, to deal well with conflict. And v18 is just one piece of common sense. A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict. But the one who is patient calms a struggle.

**In the marriage prep course which my wife and I teach,** one of the tools we give couples is the idea of calling a time-out. "I'm too angry right now to talk about this. I need a time-out. You and I are ok, but I need to take a walk. Can we set aside time after dinner to talk about it again."

- Bible gives the solution: peace with God

**So there's general wisdom about conflict.** But there's also gospel wisdom. There's the way that God's plan for peace informs our conflicts, transforms our interactions. And one example is our second Bible-reading from 1 Peter. This passage is not about the household, but in the letter, Peter has just been dealing with households, and now he widens the view to the household of God, the church. And he says, v8: "be like-minded, sympathetic, love each other, be

compassionate and humble, don't repay evil for evil." And that's a pretty good way to address conflict.

**But where does the power come from for that?** Where do we find the strength to do what we should do in our conflicts? The answer is: **the gospel. v18:** For... because... Christ also suffered like that. Not just as an example. But for you. Instead of you. He suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. To reconcile you to God. That key relationship has the power to transform my other relationships.

**It's like that bit of wisdom that says the best way you can love your kids** is to love your spouse. Doesn't mean my kids aren't important. There's just a prior relationship. A more primary relationship, and if you get that right, all kinds of benefits will flow into your other household relationships.

**And if Jesus has taken on himself the burden of my wrong-doing** so I can have peace with God, then in my conflict, my turmoil, my household, no matter how bad things are, I'm not bound to just pay back like for like. Insult for insult. Betrayal for betrayal.

**That doesn't mean I do nothing.** That doesn't mean I put up with abuse. But gospel wisdom says that if you know what God is done for you, it frees you from having to limit your response to conflict to how others are responding to conflict. You're not enslaved to the arms race of bitterness. I can inject peace and grace and hope. Because I have an outside source.

**And that's the main problem in home conflicts.** The arms race. We can't help returning like for like. You don't do the dishes, so I make a sarcastic remark. So you stonewall over dinner. So I go out to the shed after dinner and ignore you.

**General wisdom can help you there.** General wisdom says that's dumb. You'll give yourself an ulcer. And general wisdoms says, be patient, hold your tongue, try to forgive. And in this series you can cherry-pick some of the biblical wisdom, and some of the tools for dealing with conflict. And that will help you in your conflicts. But this series has both general wisdom, and gospel wisdom. And the power is in the gospel wisdom. Jesus dying on the cross, Jesus rising to new life. God's plan for peace. That's the game-changer for conflict. Don't lose sight of that as get into the detail of peace-making.

- Body

**So two different types of wisdom** that the Bible brings to bear on peace and conflict. But we still haven't really talked about conflict yet - where it comes from; how to respond to it. And for this I'm going to borrow a couple of tools from the course we're running at the moment on Monday nights called Resolving Everyday Conflict. It's only just started, you can jump in tomorrow night, 7:30pm here. But the course is produced by a group called **Peacemakers** in the US, and PeaceWise, here is Australia. And they're all about Christian Conflict Resolution. And I want to show you two of their tools for helping us starting understanding conflict, especially our home conflicts.

- Where does conflict come from?

**The first tool is called the Anatomy of Conflict**, and it goes like this. Every conflict has 3 parts - the sparks, the fuel, and the fire. If you break down your conflict into these 3 parts, you'll understand where the conflict is coming from, and what impact it's having on your relationships.

- **Sparks**

**The sparks are the things that trigger conflict.** Sometimes the spark is our differences. God has made each of us unique and different, and given each of us unique and different experiences. Romans 12 says we have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. So when flatmates live together. When a couple live together. They come with different gifts, different personalities, different preferences, and different families of origin. In marriage preparation, we introduce couples to the families map:

<SLIDE>

**This is a crucial tool for getting to bottom of conflict.** Because depending on how connected your family were, depending on how flexible your family were, you'll have different expectations for the people you live with. Some of us grew up in the bottom left with routine and structure and discipline. The military family. Some of us grow up in the top right - the combie van family. Everything's free and easy and always changing. That diagram explains at least half of the conflict in your household.

**So something that triggers conflict is our differences.** But differences aren't bad. The Bible actually celebrates that diversity. Especially in the church:

**(1Co 12:18) But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?**

**The differences are designed to work together.** That's God's design for the church family. And the home. Different strengths, weaknesses, personalities, preferences, desires. But complementary. There are extraverts and introverts. Clean freaks and Messy Bessie's. We complement each other, but it does also spark conflict. Our differences lead to misunderstandings. Our different desires butt heads. Those are the sparks.

- Fuel

**The fuel for the fire is what turns the spark into a conflict.** A conflagration. And that is when our different desires get out of control. Here's what the Bible says:

**What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.**

**When the desire turns into a demand.** When the demand turns into a judgement. When the judgement turns into a punishment. That's when conflict happens. Desires aren't bad by themselves. Usually our conflicts are about good things desired too much. Good things desired at the expense of other people. That's what the Bible calls idolatry. A good thing turned into a God thing. Instead of worshipping the giver, we worship the gift. Your God is your wallet. Or your stomach. Or your peace and quiet. Or your physical relationship. Or your promotion. And you know it's an idol because you start to sacrifice other people to it. But people don't like getting sacrificed to your idol. Sacrificed for your desires. So there's conflict.

**[Culture does not help us out on this.** This week I got my new ING Direct credit card. And the slogan at the top of the letter? "Spend your life well." That's like the lotto slogan isn't it. "Spend the rest of your life." Or the life insurance slogan: "For the most important person in the world. You." Our desires get out of control because we put them in control. We take on board those slogans that say you should get whatever you want. You should pursue whatever you desire. Because when everyone is pursuing what they desire, our desires clash. My out-of-control desires clash with your out-of-control desires. My idol disagrees with your idol. My desire for peace and quiet clashes with your desire to talk about your day. And there's conflict.]

- Fire

**So the sparks are the differences and desires,** the fuel is out of control desires, and the fire is the destructive effect on your relationships. All your relationships. If peace and quiet is my god, then Jesus isn't. My relationship with Jesus is going to suffer. The Bible says God has made us for a relationship with himself, and he won't share us with an idol. And in the home. When we don't resolve our conflicts, they burn away like embers on the friendship, at the marriage, at the relationship. It sucks out the joy and it grows the bitterness. We want to spend less time together. We stop talking about heart issues and only talk about material issues. And it can burn down the household. It can burn all those relationships to the ground.

- E.g. Wendy video - sources of conflict in the home

**We are very fortunate that the NSW director of the PeaceWise** organisation actually works over at Katoomba. She does conflict mediation work, and she also does family counselling work. I popped over last week and asked her about the sources of conflict she sees in homes.

<VIDEO>

**So that's the anatomy of conflict,** and you can use that tool for your conflict at home. What are the sparks, what are the differences here. What is the fuel. Are there desires that are getting out of control. A good thing turned into a god thing? And what is the fire. What impact is this conflict having on my relationships. That is just some good general biblical wisdom. God has made us different, but those differences can get out of control and become idols, and that will have a destructive effect on my relationship with God, and with those people closest to me.

- How do we respond to conflict?

So what do we do about our conflicts? Well, that's the second tool from PeaceWise for this morning. This one is called the Slippery Slope Diagram. Here it is: <SLIDE>

**And this diagram shows us that there are a range of responses to conflict.** And most of the time you just default to responding in the same old way to conflict. And most of us default to one side or the other, one extreme or the other, because it's a slippery slope.

- Slippery slope: Escape, Attack, Peacemaking

**So you might slide to the left. The escape responses.** Whenever conflict happens, you run away. You deny it's happening. You avoid the problem. You resign yourself to not dealing with it. You leave the relationship. And there are extreme situations where you have to that for your

physical safety. But the problem with escape responses is that nothing changes. When you come back, if you come back, the issues are all still there. The relationship is still in a mess.

**Or you might slide to the right. The attack responses.** Whenever conflict happens, you go into bat. You point the finger. You blame. You gossip. You take revenge. You verbally assault. You intimidate. You threaten. Perhaps you physically assault. And the attack responses very quickly burn a relationship to the ground. You may still live together, but there won't be any affection, and there won't be any joy.

**Now in between the escape responses and attack responses,** in between fight and flight, are what we call the peacemaking responses. And these are harder. You don't naturally sit at the top of the slope. You have to work at it, work against sliding down whichever side you're on. But these are all responses you find in the Bible:

**So sometimes the best response is to overlook.** In Proverbs it says... it is to man's glory to overlook an offence. That's not to deny it, or avoid it, but you decide that this issue isn't hurting our relationship, it's not disobeying God, I'll just let it go.

**If we can't overlook it, or we shouldn't overlook it.** The Bible says there's a good sequence of steps to follow. And there's a fantastic process that Jesus gives us. Matthew chapter 18 that talks us through it: <SLIDE>

**Try to reconcile with the person 1:1. (Mat 18:1) 15** "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. . If they listen to you, you have won them over. Your first step isn't confronting them at the dinner table in front of everyone else. If the first someone here's about the conflict is in front of other people, they'll go defensive, or they'll accuse you right back. No, go to them 1 on 1.

**Step two. Jesus continues: 16 But if they will not listen,** take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' This is negotiation, or mediation. It's not an intervention. It's getting a couple of people you both respect who can help you be objective.

I used to live with two other guys. And the second guy stopped paying his rent. Stopped going to work. And was playing computer games all day. We couldn't get the bottom of what was happening. So we brought in a friend we had in common from church. Someone outside the home to get some objectivity on the conflict.

**Step three. 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church.** If you're all members of a common body. The church is a great place to do conflict because we have a common basis. We share the gospel wisdom that helps us resolve our conflicts. But if you're not all part of a church family, this could be going to someone you both respect: your parents, going to a family friend, going to a counsellor. If the other person doesn't agree, you still might have to bring in someone to help mediate, or adjudicate the conflict. You might have to call in family and community services. Or the police in some cases. But the principle is if the conflict gets stuck at one point, you take it to the next level to get the help you need.

**Now we'll be doing this tool tomorrow night at the conflict course.** 7:30pm here. Not too late to join. But I'm showing you it now because we need to know how conflict works, and we need to know how we work. And we need to open up new possibilities for dealing with conflict. Maybe you've been dealing with conflict the only way you know how. Maybe you need to learn a new way how.

- A vision of peace in the home

**So I want to finish with a vision for peace in the home.** I asked Wendy for an example in her experience of someone whose home conflict was transformed. A story of hope, and she gave her personal story:

<VIDEO>

So what are we hoping for in this series? Well let me finish with that Bible reading from 1 Peter 3 again.

**So v8,** it says "be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble."

Wouldn't you love a household like that? One where people are aware of conflict, not afraid of conflict. Where we know each other's differences, but we're sympathetic to each other's differences. We're like-minded in our desire to be in good relationship. We love each other. We don't sacrifice the other household members to our idols. We sacrifice ourselves for the good of the other household members. We're willing to suffer, not for someone else's idol, but we're willing to suffer for Christ.

**v15. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.** Imagine kicking the idols out of your house, and inviting Jesus in as Lord of your household. Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock. Whoever hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come in and eat with them, and they will eat with me." Better a plate of vegetables

with Jesus, and than a rack of ribs with turmoil and conflict. Because Jesus is not like the idols. You don't have to sacrifice people to Jesus. He has sacrificed himself for us. **v18. For Christ suffered once for sins,** the righteousness for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. To rebuild your burnt-down relationship with God. So now you're free to pursue peace. To be a peace-maker instead of a peace-faker or peace-breaker. To work on not just resolving conflict, but reconciling relationships. To deal with the material issues and the heart issues. And we're going to see more of that at work next week when we move to the workplace and think about how to be a peace-maker at work.