# Introduction …

Here we are in week 4 of REC. A few weeks ago we introduced the slippery slope in looking at how we naturally approach conflict. Remember this? Escape or attack, and our need to try to stay on top of conflict, shown in these four “G’s”. And last week Jimmy introduced the first one – go to higher ground, that is we should reflect our values, what lies behind our actions. For the Christians among us, it is summed up in 1 Cor 10:31,

*“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”*

Conflict isn’t just horizontal, we need to bring the vertical into how we deal with conflict. The reality is that the way God has dealt with me, should impact how I deal with others. And in every conflict there comes this “moment” when we can choose to do so. See if you can see the moment in this clip of a conflict in the office … *Play week 4 clip 1 …*

Tell me, who was in the wrong here? Both of them!!! You can see the moment – they both experience it, do they keep arguing, or do they choose not to from their heart? And what in particular would reflect that change of heart? Perhaps their language? Can you tell me what word was repeated over and over in this clip? Yes … “you” 16 times!!

# Introducing the second “G”: Get real about yourself (Matt 7:3-5) …

Focusing on God and his glory always leads to less language about “you” and more on me: changes the focus 180 degrees. And Jesus knew this. And this thought is behind our second G which reflects his words in Matthew 7:3-5,

*“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?* *4 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?* *5 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.”*

## Jesus knows we are blind …

This is one of those penetratingly practical statements of the Lord Jesus. He knows how blind we are to our own faults, or, even worse, as we see on the top of page 18, how we intentionally minimize our role in a conflict. We can so readily exercise the gift of exaggeration on behalf of others, and minimization for ourselves. Have you ever heard, or used, the trust statement, “all I said was …”. We so want to point out the other person’s contribution, that we minimize or forget ours!!

Now Jesus doesn’t say “the other person has done nothing, how dare you want to point that out!!” no, he recognizes not only that we all make contributions, but even that we want to help each other with that!!! His issue is rather about where we look first. Us: Less you language, and more me language, less accusation and more confession, less judgment and more mercy. Jesus is not against us helping each other with our specks, his point is this is not where you start!!! Instead, he wants you and me to do something not natural for us: focus on our own contribution first!!

## A rule to live by …

Page 18 sets it up in a simple rule to live by – *Even if you are only responsible for 2% of a conflict your 100% responsible for your 2%.* Its about getting real with yourself. Its about getting the log out of your eye, and the first step in doing this is to admit it to the other party. And the good news is the first admission, generally leads to the other party doing the same. There is an incredible release in any conflict once one party first apologizes. Let’s see this play out in a second take at our conflict in the office over those numbers …

*… play Week 4 clip 2 …*

The blame game is regular thing in our homes, work, even the church, but it only escalates the situation, and someone needs to break it. Anyone can. They only need to do what the Lord Jesus says – get the log out of your own eye ***first***.

# Getting to the heart of conflict …

## What is an idol? …

How do we do this? How do we get a good understanding of the log in our eye, of our contribution to conflict? I take you back to week one and how the Bible answers that question in James 4:1-2,

*“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. You do not have because you do not ask God.”*

You see our contribution is not simply that “I yelled and gritted my teeth”, our hearts lie behind those actions. As this passage says, our conflict and fights come from our “desires that battle with us”. Our hearts. To get the log out of our eye, we need to look under our words and expressions and see what drives them: The “why” of our actions. You may have yelled in anger, but what caused you to yell? And it’s not just because someone else did whatever they did!! It’s something inside of us that has been challenged, hurt or threatened. A log hunt always drives us to examine our cravings and desires. Or what the Bible calls “idols”, that is, things other than God that we set our hearts on (Luke 12:29)

*“And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.”*

Things that rule us (Ephesians 5:5), *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God”, a*nd things we trust, serve or fear, (Isaiah 42:17), *But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in utter shame.*

## How does an idol work? …

Page nineteen has a great definition of an idol, or a log, *Anything other than God that we trust to make us happy or secure.* And these idols play out as logs in our conflict in five simply steps as we can see there: First our idols come from our desires. Desire is not a bad thing, Psalm 37:4 says if we delight in the Lord he will give us the desire of our hearts, so desiring is a God given thing!! It is not sinful!! How can our good and godly reality of desiring lead to idol making? And what if what we desire is good and healthy? Missions? Worship? Prayer? Exercise? Good morals? Yes, even the desire for godly things can become idols, when we rest our happiness and security in them instead of the Lord Jesus. And this is seen in the second step, as our desire moves to becoming an idol. We soon demand a certain thing of outcome. I now view the thing as absolutely essential. I cannot go without it, and more to the point, others can’t go without it either.

And this demand can easily lead to step three in conflict, when I don’t’ get what I demand, I am deeply disappointed as people don’t give me my desires!!! Much of our disappointments in relationships is not so much because people have wronged us, but because they have failed to give us what we want: not washing the dishes on time, not making the bed. Not … I desire to serve my own comfort. I desire to be in control!! These can be the idols that are disappointed when we have conflict over these things.

And the disappointment then moves into judgment – because you did not give me my desire, you are …” how quickly not getting what we want can lead to condemning, judging them. We either lash out with our tongue to them face, to face, or can find ourselves, gossiping about them to others, bringing them down behind their back.

And this judgment quickly moves to step five: punishment. Whether its the gossip to others, the harsh words to their face, the exasperation of parents when their desire for control and respect is greater than their desire for God, or the withdrawal of money, engagement or respect of others. Its all among the different ways we seek to punish others when we don’t get what we want. Like James 4:2 says,

*“2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.”*

This plays out so easily in our lives that others begin to be moulded to, or trained by, our idols. You know, don’t do that around Paul, he’ll just … . And don’t raise that issue with Susie, you know what she will do. We start walking around on egg shells around each other as we honour their idols, rather recognizing these idols in our lives that hold us back spiritually, relationally, physically, emotionally and in many other ways in our lives.

## What do I look for in idols in my life? …

What can help me identify these idols in my life? These things that keep coming back in every conflict I have? Well, they lie deep in our hearts so we need some “x-ray’ questions to get to the depth of our hearts. And page 20 sets out four as a good start

### Questions about your fears:

What do you fear? What do you tend to worry about? What do you believe would bring you the greatest pain or misery?

### Questions about your pleasure

What do you want? What do you believe would bring you the greatest pleasure, happiness or delight?

### Questions about your behaviour

What would you sin to obtain sin if its denied?

### Questions about what you cover up?

What have you stretched the truth over? What have you argued over with someone else because they couldn’t give you what you desire? What have you lied about?

These are fundamental questions to ask because our idols come back over and over again. Do you have the same fights at times? Dealing with the surface issues are not enough, we need to get to the root of our conflict, our logs in our eyes as Jesus says to find real change. Halfway down page 20 in italics has it right: *One thing is guaranteed: you will keep having the same conflict if you don’t uncover the idols of your heart!*

I think of the disastrous conflicts in our families – my family! When as a father I exasperate my boys as I raise my voice, speak in anger and rudeness. This is not righteous anger, even when they have a speck in their eyes in not honouring their father I have to be careful that the log of my desire for honour and respect is not an idol that is controlling me. Is my self-worth and security in how often my sons obey me? If so, I will always be disappointed. I will never be truly happy, because they won’t do it as much as I would like. I will never be happy and satisfied if my desire is for respect and honour.

## How do I deal with idols? …

I will only be full satisfied and content if my desire is for the Lord Jesus. The cure for an idolatrous heart is in two steps. First, to confess my idol before God, and before others can help there. And second, to replace my worship, love and desire for it, with my worship, love and desire for the Lord Jesus. The Bible is full of this truth, but a simple and clear expression of it is what I quoted before from Psalm 37:4 *“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you’re the desires of your heart.”*

How? Praying and asking him to turn you around, it starts, with his action in me

Eyes of our hearts opened by hearing his word (Romans 10:13-15)

Spending time with him, not just a quiet time, but a joyful and honest relationship

Loving God greater than our idols. Abiding in him (john 15), Looking to him (col 3), letting him live in you (Gal 2:19-20).

Get lost in the wonder of the gospel, the joy of a god that loves us so much that he gave his son, who for the joys set before him, endured the cross.

Get lost in the anticipation of what’s ahead – the contentment and delight of being in God’s presence, with no tears, fears, dissatisfaction and disappointment. To be with him. Forever. And embrace that reality now as I look at the cross, creation, and the goodness in people – all from our great and glorious God.

Our hearts are idol factories, always seeking now things to worship and celebrate. Trying harder to remove my idol, get rid of my log, is not the answer. Looking more to Jesus is. Thomas Chalmers wrote about the *expulsive power of a new affection* (Page 20), the idea of driving out a little love and with a BIG love, a growing love for God that will force out the idols in our hearts. As God fills our hearts with a love for himself, we will no longer love our logs, but be driven more to seek our security, joy and happiness in him, listening to him, and finding the power and strength not only to admit our idols and logs, but to say no to them and yes to Jesus and serve others first.

# Conclusion …

Today was all about a “log hunt”. But a hunt that is successful not when we focus on the logs. But focus on the one who rescues us from our logs. As we enter worship, I want to take your minds forward to the moment of greatest joy, the details we still don’t know, but imagining it, imagining him, in anticipation, can take our joy to Him. Consider this ….

*… Play “I can only imagine” …*