

3 Conflict Resolution Lessons From Humble Moses

Have you ever noticed that deep relationships often involve conflict?

It feels counterintuitive. We tend to think, “If you like me, you will agree with me, be nice to me and not cause me pain.”

I first noticed this phenomenon with my daughters. For some reason, as they progress through the stages of life, all-out war seems to be followed by a time of peace and friendship.

Then I got really mad at my boss. You might know this mad—I was so mad I prayed David’s “destroy my enemies” prayers. How intense!

Soon, I realized I needed to fix things, and I went to my boss to iron out the issue. A funny thing happened. After we ironed out the issue, the trust in our relationship actually increased.

What is it about conflict that draws us closer?

Does this relationship dynamic happen with God? We know difficult times often send us clamoring to be in His lap, but what about those times when He frustrates us? How can we fight for intimacy instead of running away?

There are two incidents in the Bible that help shed light on how we can handle conflict with God.

Moses: Called to Change

Moses was finally happy. He’d released any hope of returning to Egypt and spent countless contented days watching sheep throughout the hills of Midian.

In the wilderness, fire is an odd thing. It is destructive and life-giving. It helps things to grow by clearing out all the underbrush, but first it destroys everything in its path. For Moses, fire in the wilderness was not welcome. If the fire was containable (i.e., still on just one bush), it should be stopped.

Imagine Moses, intent on protecting his sheep, approaching this bush. The fire wasn't spreading! It stayed on just one bush. As Moses approached to smother the fire, God spoke.

Immediately, Moses realized his sheep weren't in danger. Instead, he faced a bigger threat to stability: God asked Moses to do things he didn't want to do.

Return to leadership? Take on Pharaoh? Moses was comfortable. Life was good! Why should he take on all that stress? Moses and God were in conflict.

Here's what we can learn from Moses' conflict with God.

1. Talk to God. Remember when you got mad at your mom or dad? Some of us yelled, some of us just huffed, but almost all of us stomped off to nurse our wounds. Moses didn't do any of that. He talked to God. He didn't worry about offending God. Instead he was honest: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?"

2. Stay engaged. When God answered one of Moses' frustrations, Moses brought up another. He didn't capitulate until they'd discussed all the details. This is a very stressful way to converse. A lot of times, we want to walk away and avoid the conflict until it isn't so intense. Moses stayed engaged.

3. Listen. Moses listened to what God had to say. He didn't just dump his emotions and concerns. He let God paint a picture of the future as God saw it. He let God give him new tools. And he let God infuse him with the emotional and spiritual energy he needed to accomplish the task.

The other part of Scripture we need to look at to understand how to fight for intimacy with God is Matthew 14.

Is That a Ghost?

The disciples, hunkered down in a boat, pushing with all their might to stay upright in yet another wave. This storm was not friendly, and each wave brought new anxiety and danger. Then, as fatigue threatened to stop their efforts, they started seeing things.

Someone toward the back of the boat caught a glimpse of something out on the water that didn't move like the waves. He paused in his rowing to wipe his eyes and look again. The figure was still there. Adrenaline flooded his body as fear, now caused by this strange aberration, took over. "Look!" he cried.

The disciples paused in their rowing, ignoring the storm for a moment. A ghost? Walking on the water? That can't be good. The end must be near.

You know how your thoughts work far faster than your response? Before they could do more than cry out, Jesus spoke: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

The disciples were in conflict. Everything they'd ever learned told them they were in an impossible situation, and a ghost walking on the water could only mean their doom. They had a choice. Peter chose to ignore everything his occupation had taught him and try faith instead: "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."

You know the rest of the story. Peter's lesson was only the beginning, and within a few minutes he learned that no matter how big the waves of life get, the key to survival is to keep your eyes on Jesus.

What can we learn about intimacy with God from this event?

1. Realize that sometimes the thing that scares you most is really God at work. The disciples, busy surviving, used the skills they had as fishermen to keep the boat upright. Jesus didn't show up as a calming presence, making everything peaceful. His appearance scared them and made their stress much higher.

2. Know God's voice. The disciples recognized Jesus by His voice. When He spoke, Peter was infused with faith. When you are in calm season, take the time to get to know God. Spend time listening to Him as He speaks to your heart and teaches you.

3. Focus on relationship. When kids fight (and most adults, truth be told), they fight to be acknowledged as right. They fight to make the other person capitulate. They fight for honor. When you fight with God, focus on relationship. What if Peter said, "Jesus, that can't be You. You'd never let us struggle." Instead, Peter asked, "If that is You, tell me to come to You on the water." What a different response!

It is tempting to say, "God, I'm glad You showed up. You show these people how wrong they are!" Instead, if we use the opportunity to get to know God more, we might say, "God, if that is You, help me to act like You," or, "Lord, if this is You, please help me see things like You do."

For both Moses and the disciples, these incidents were pivotal and foundational. They not only knew God better, but they also were called to deeper levels of responsibility. For Moses, within a short time, he was leading the entire nation of Israel out of slavery. The disciples continued with Jesus and eventually put their lives on the line for His message, using all their energy to grow the church and introduce people to the One who could make a real difference.

What about you? What type of hard time are you going through? Are you like Moses? Has God showed up where you were

comfortable and called you to change? Or, like the disciples, do you feel like you're drowning, but the hard times just kept coming?

How can you engage God in the middle of your stress so your relationship with Him grows deeper? Tell us on Facebook.

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