

I Knew I Was Beginning to Heal When

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Scripture Readings (NIV)

Proverbs 12:16, *“Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.”*

Proverbs 25:28, *“Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.”*

Proverbs 16:32, *“Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.”*

Proverbs 29:11, *“Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end.”*

Proverbs 4:23, *“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”*

Introduction

Conflict in our Christian walk is largely unavoidable. What matters then, since our paths and conflict will cross, is how we deal with that conflict. For us as Christians, the Word of God is very clear and our goal is to glorify God in all that we do, including how we manage conflict.

It saddens me to announce that I have been blocked by someone on WhatsApp and Facebook. Well, not sad to be blocked, but sad that someone would go to these extraordinary lengths:

1. With the assumption that they have all the facts.
2. With the creation of false assumptions.
3. Believing that they are the victim.
4. With an enormous sense of entitlement.
5. With a forgetfulness of recent history, meaning the false assumption that all things are equal.
6. With an assumption that they are the authority to whom all parties are accountable
7. And an enormous need to self-justify.

It seems that saying, “there is nothing to talk about” has enormous consequences when people

do not grasp that you are drawing a line in the sand which says, “enough of the abuse!”

To repeat, conflict in our Christian walk is largely unavoidable. What matters then, since our paths and conflict will cross, is how we deal with that conflict. For us as Christians, the Word of God is very clear and our goal is to glorify God in all that we do, including how we manage conflict.

Body

If I did not draw a line in the sand and engage the person, matters would be:

1. On their territory.
2. At their timing.
3. According to their rules.
4. And would only be “over,” when they say so, in other words, when they have “won.”
5. Two people reacting with one another.

Now when people are winning, there is an ever-present danger that God is not being glorified. What I mean by this is that not everything calls for a reaction, but a response.

There is a world of difference between the two.

One speaks of room for emotional growth, the other speaks of emotional maturity. One speaks of a need to be right, the other speaks of knowing. One speaks of a potential fight, the other speaks of standing firm. One speaks of the need to be right, the other speaks of the need to be reconciled. One gives the other a license to continue the abuse, the other sets a boundary. One speaks of self-centredness, the other speaks of Christ-centredness.

Let’s discuss them and become mindful of them so that we can learn and glorify God in all that we do.

Reactions

When you react, chances are that your centre of control is on the outside, meaning that the Fruit of the Holy Spirit who is inside of Christians is not what others will see.

When you react, you meet fire with fire. We see, in Luke 9:52-54 the disciples reacting,

“And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’” Luke gives context in verse 51, “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”

When you react, your beliefs, bias and prejudices are doing the talking. In an emotionally charged arena, your beliefs, bias, and prejudices don’t even have to be rational. Therefore, when someone is both irrational and reacting, there is a low probability of a God-glorifying outcome.

Have you thought about the possibility of being prejudiced? If your attitude reflects a lack of factual supporting information, maybe it’s time for self-reflection.

How open are you to the possibility of being biased? Most people lean one way or another regarding a certain subject or argument. In our bias, there might be some credible supporting information, but the challenge lay in the fact that people reinforce their biases – they don’t want to be wrong. People will find information – and not necessarily credible information – to prove themselves right.

Another thing to keep in mind is that when we react, it can also be a defence mechanism kicking in before we have thought things through – it’s an instant response to something said or a situation. When people react, they appear to be emotional, aggressive, disagreeing, and weak.

Let’s upscale...what is likely to happen when two people are reacting to one another in the same conversation? Triggers are pulled and bullets fired. God is unlikely to be glorified. With this in mind, let’s again read two of this morning’s Scriptures:

1. Proverbs 12:16, *“Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.”*
2. Proverbs 29:11, *“Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end.”*

Responding

A response is information-driven. When someone reacts, it is usually with the information that they have at that moment together with a few assumptions:

- That their information is complete.
- That their information is correct.

Let go back to Luke 9 that I read earlier. The disciples asked Jesus if they should call fire down from heaven to destroy people, Jesus on the other hand, rebuked them; He was saying “don’t do that.” The disciples were reacting, Jesus was responding. As the CEV translation says in verse 51, “*Not long before it was time for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, he made up his mind to go to Jerusalem.*” Jesus was not about to let reactions take Him off the course of doing the Father’s will.

A response makes little assumptions. A response is properly informed, and the mature believer will realize that prejudices, biases and so forth can cloud his/her available information. A response contextualizes in terms of the bigger picture and considers all available options.

A response is not a defence mechanism, but a God-glorifying action. A response is when the Christian realizes that the Holy Spirit is inside of them, and they are therefore able to engage along with biblical principles whilst demonstrating empathy.

Now it might appear to the reacting party that the responder is distant and difficult. However, empathy says, “*I take note and will respond a bit later.*” It is also true that with some reactors, anything said by a responder will be the beginning of the next argument. For them. Take note: for them. You cannot have a rational conversation with an irrational person. Stand your ground, “*a bit later*” means “*a bit later.*”

Likewise, “*there is nothing to talk about*” means that I am not going to enter an argument; it means that I am not going to react to your reactions; it means that any further conversation with you is going to lead nowhere; it means that I, as I may do, am setting a boundary.

Essentially, when you respond, your control is from inside where the Holy Spirit is resident. In this sense, when Godly emotional and spiritual maturity are undergirding your responses, you are at the same time, demonstrating His rule over your heart and life, thus witnessing for Christ.

Let’s recall two more Scriptures from this morning’s readings:

1. Proverbs 16:32, “*Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one*

who takes a city.”

2. Proverbs 4:23, *“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”*

Conclusion

A response is beneficial not only for your spiritual and emotional health but also for those around you. Therefore, as you learn to respond instead of reacting, your emotional and spiritual health improves as your core values are lived out. People who respond appear to be certain, calm, confident, empowered, and cooperative.

You grow from a threat-ward focus that says “react” to a God-ward focus that says “respond.”

The following Scriptures brings home the need to learn to respond instead of reacting – perhaps spend some time with them in the week?

1. Romans 12:2, *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*
2. Philippians 4:8, *“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”*
3. 2 Corinthians 4:16, *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”*

Christians can have an unshakeable inner strength because of the Holy Spirit in them, pointing them toward Christ who helps us glorify the Father.

Amen.