



Conflict

Part 2 – The Biology of Conflict

I. Introduction

When we are involved in interpersonal conflict, our brains often function in ways that sabotage our desired outcomes. As disciples of Jesus, we shouldn't be ignorant of this biological reality. If we are ignorant, we might erroneously overlay "spiritual" language into a conflict that is actually driven by an unchecked "fight/flight" response to perceived danger. When this happens, individuals are subject to spiritual manipulation and disciples lose both their witness to the world and their joy with each other.

Culturally, as we learned last week, we have generally grown more sensitive to offence (cf. *Rise of Victimhood Culture*). Because of this added sensitivity, our fight/flight response is likely to be triggered more often. When we have unregulated flight/flight response to conflict, we feel justified to "do what it takes" to feel safe again. Doing this, of course, usually adds to the conflict making it worse and making the possibility of peace less likely.

II. Brain basics

Amygdala – Where is it and what does it do?

"smoke detector" v. "amygdala hijack"

Frontal Cortex – Where is it and what does it do?

Corpus Callosum – Where is it and what does it do?

III. Fight/Flight – “Reaction design to move us”

1. What triggers the fight/flight in conversations? High Stakes, High Emotion and Differing Opinions

Danger “protect” or danger “fight”

2. What happens to your body?

Adrenaline glands

Rapid Breathing

Quivering

Heat flush

Jaw set

Blood rushed to muscles

What happens to your frontal lobe?

Critical reasoning diminished

Memory becomes untrustworthy in this state (e.g. can't remember good things about your spouse!)

3. Behaviors of Flight/Fight

Fight:

Attacking/biting

Controlling

Manipulation

Flight:

Masking

Avoiding

Withdraw

IV. Call of a Disciple: Peacemaker (Ken Sande)



James 1:19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger

Wisdom is often found in what you DON'T do!

V. Strategies

1. "Crucial Conversations" Approaches

Make it safe!

- Step one: apologize
- Step two: start with heart
- Step three: do the A.B.C's

S.T.A.T.E your path

- Share facts
- Tell your story
- Ask feedback
- Talk tentative
- Encourage testing

2. "Harvard" Approaches (Diane Hamilton – "Calming Your Brain During Conflict" *Harvard Business Review*)

Step One: stay present – notice we are provoked....fight our body's desire to go on automatic pilot.

Step Two: Let go of the story. Let go of the judging mind. Doing this shuts down the feedback loop between our mind and our body.

Step Three: Focus on the body. Ask yourself: what is tight in the body as a way to reestablishing equilibrium.

Step Four: Breath in rhythm and smooth.

Doing these steps will up the odds you:

- Respond rather than react.
- Turn anger into clarity and resolve.

Question: what is your normal response to a conflict? Escape, attack or both?