# Learning Together: People Matter (3)

# As Luke and my kids grow in independence, I find it a challenging task to journey with them as they begin to navigate the complex world of human relationships. Last term, our five year old returned home from a day at school reporting “Mum, Georgia\*[[1]](#endnote-1) is not being very kind.” She went on to share what she had experienced at school that day, and the pain she felt about her interactions with her classmate. The same words were repeated often by my daughter, following repeated encounters in the weeks that followed.

# I suspect we have all returned home at the end of many days with similar stories, of situations where we have felt hurt, misunderstood, disappointed; all the more so as we experience life in community.

# Michael Yankoski, author of The Sacred Year, wrote of life in community,

# *Life together is messy…When you are committed to doing life together, you see one another all the time- … then it becomes a lot harder to just let grievances die.”[[2]](#endnote-2)*

# As we continue to explore how people matter, this paper will consider how we can value and respect one another amidst moments of conflict and pain.

# The view of conflict that many people have internalised is that it is bad, unhealthy, that unity means not disagreeing! I still recall one of my good friends telling me when I was about to get married, that after two years of marriage, her and her husband had never had a disagreement! I remember the deep guilt I felt less than a week into our honeymoon, when Luke and I did not see things eye to eye! Like it or not, conflict is an inevitable part of any relationship.[[3]](#endnote-3)

# If we happen to be courageous in these moments of conflict or difference, it’s possible for our attempts at resolution to be clumsy, and I can think of times when, despite my best intentions, I’ve found myself becoming defensive, trying to win the argument, forgetting to listen, and then afterwards playing the blame game, generalizing, criticising, blaming, skewing the truth. Does any of that sound familiar?

# Alongside of this, we all come with our own histories and tendencies when it comes to conflict. You may like to spend some time reflecting on how you deal with conflict. Do you tend to avoid conflict at all costs? Are you inclined to give in when others represent a different opinion? Maybe you want everyone to win and take a lot of time and effort trying to get a shared outcome? Perhaps you are forceful and compelling, convinced that your way is the way?[[4]](#endnote-4)

# So what do we do when we find ourselves in disagreement or conflict with another? How do we maintain respect and appreciation of another when we experience feelings of hurt rise?

# Kim Scott in her book, Radical Candour, states

# [*Being willing to disagree because you care is the greatest sign of respect you can show others*](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.forbes.com%2Fsites%2Froncarucci%2F2017%2F03%2F14%2Fhow-to-use-radical-candor-to-drive-great-results%2F&text=Being%20willing%20to%20disagree%20because%20you%20care%20is%20the%20greatest%20sign%20of%20respect%20you%20can%20show%20others)*. Ignoring others by ignoring the truth is not.[[5]](#endnote-5)*

# She goes on to outline that by showing respect through disagreeing, two things are key: To care personally and challenge directly.[[6]](#endnote-6) She suggests that our tendency is either to challenge without care (leading to obnoxious aggression), or care without challenge (resulting in ruinous empathy), and that the overlap of care and challenge is key to building trusting relationships because it embraces conflict rather than avoiding it.

This seems consistent with Jesus’ words in Matthew,

*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister* ***has something against you*** *leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to that person; then come and offer your gift.*[[7]](#endnote-7)

And:

*If a brother or a sister sins against you, go and point out the fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along*[[8]](#endnote-8)

Jesus then goes on to suggest some ways to proceed if harmony doesn’t result from such a meeting. His advice accords with common conflict resolution practice, which can be summarised as follows:

# Take some time for personal reflection.

# If the matter affects your relationship:

# Go in private and seek to work the situation out 1 to 1. You could gently ask questions such as, “What did you intend by that word or action?” or “What was going on for you in that situation?”

# That may be enough for your relationship to be restored, but if it isn’t, you might like to ask “Would you like to know what happened for me?” Again, that might lead to responses that restore the relationship or resolve a misunderstanding, but it’s worthwhile checking with both yourself and the other person what could be done to “make things right” between you.

# If this process doesn’t lead to resolution:

# Seek assistance from wise skilled people who can help resolve the issue by facilitating a meeting between you and the other person.

Of course, not all issues can be resolved and not all relationships can be completely reconciled. There are moments when we are called to become aware of our involvement in conflict, to know God's forgiveness and to move as far toward reconciliation with others as God’s grace and justice will allow us to go.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Last year, I realised I was carrying pain and resentment from the last decade of life. As I reflected, I could see the pain largely came from my own expectations of others that hadn’t been met and my own tendency to see the speck in others’ eyes, rather than the plank in my own[[10]](#endnote-10)! The more I reflected, I realised that some of these expectations were unrealistic and at times, inappropriate. I started asking myself, “What has to die so I can experience a rebirth in my relationships?”[[11]](#endnote-11) I began grappling with the words of Jesus, “No one takes (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father,”[[12]](#endnote-12) and beginning to face “there is no integrity in blaming and turning to “it’s not fair” and “I deserve”. I need to take responsibility for my own well-being.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

# So, while there are moments for care and challenge, there are also moments for grace and forgiveness. I was challenged when our 5 year old returned home from school, with the next instalment with Georgia. As a parent, part of me had wanted to tell my child to just stay away from Georgia. Yet from the little I knew of Georgia and her family, there were challenges she and her family were facing, so Miss 5 and I had been having regular conversations about how she could be gracious and respectful, towards herself and others. Interestingly, a few weeks later she reported that the same child hadn’t been as unkind lately. I enquired as to what she thought had made a difference and she told me, “Mum, Georgia didn’t know how to come down the fireman’s pole. I helped her learn how to do it. Since then, she has been much kinder to me!” I realised protecting her from the pain of the earlier, uncomfortable encounters would have blocked her own growth and grapple with conflict. She was learning the joys and challenges of life with others, and I felt a renewed challenge to welcome the uncomfortable moments as she did, and meet them with grace and courage!

# Here’s a quote that challenges my ways of relating to others in a community as if they mattered:

# *“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.”* [*C.S. Lewis*](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1069006.C_S_Lewis)*[[14]](#endnote-14)*

# Ali Morgan, September 2018

1. Name has been changed to protect privacy [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Michael Yankoski. The Sacred Year. (2012) Thomas Nelson Publishers. Nashville, United States. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. https://health.uottawa.ca/rehabilitation/sites/health.uottawa.ca.rehabilitation/files/7gererlesconflits-en.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <http://bishopperryinstitute.org.au/uploads/EPIC%20Conflict%20Seminar%202012.pdf> p8 viewed 31/8/18 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Kim Scott. Radical Candour. (2018) Pan Macmillan. United Kingdom. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Kim Scott. Radical Candour. (2018) Pan Macmillan. United Kingdom. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Matthew 5: 23-24 NIV [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Matthew 18:15-17 NIV [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Tim Dyer. Conflict Management in Christian Communities. 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Matthew 7:3-5 NIV [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Brene Brown. Rising Strong. (2015) Penguin, Random House, UK. P152. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. John 10:18 NIV [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Brene Brown. Rising Strong. (2015) Penguin, Random House, UK. P119 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. # C.S.Lewis The Four Loves

    # Questions for discussion:

    # What feelings/messages/experiences have shaped your tendencies toward conflict? How are you inclined to respond when there is conflict in your relationships?

    # As you reflect on the previous papers about People Matter, what understandings about generous assumptions, hospitality, or respect might be relevant to consider when you find yourself experiencing pain and conflict?

    # In what ways would you want to change or consolidate your approach to conflict?

    # Are there any steps toward forgiveness that you are feeling prompted about?

    [↑](#endnote-ref-14)