

If you've ever wondered about the relevancy of the Bible to your daily life; I hope that today you see that the Bible is not only relevant, but timeless in the wisdom that it dispenses for our daily living. That is why we can learn so much by making the reading of the Bible a regular habit in our lives. Even if you aren't fully convinced that everything in here really happened; or aren't quite ready to go all in believing that this is the word of God; I think today's message will demonstrate the relevancy of this book to your life and the reason why, believer or not, regular reading of the Bible will benefit you and in particular your relationships.

So listen to these words that introduce the passage we are going to learn from today. This is Proverbs 3:1-2. The book of Proverbs is the collected wisdom from King Solomon set out in simple couplets that make it so easy to learn and apply. So Chapter 3 and verses 1 and 2 read like this:

*My child, never forget the things I have taught you. Store my commands in your heart, for they will give you a long and satisfying life. NLT*

Now I don't know about you, but I'm all in for a long and satisfying life. And that is one reason I read my Bible every day, because I know that in these pages there is enough wisdom to help me experience a long and satisfying life. And as we are going to learn this morning, part of that long and satisfying life involves getting our relationships right.

As we've said the last two weeks, our relationships are the greatest asset that each of us possess. That is why we risked asking three people the question, "What's it like to be on the other side of me," because while we can't see ourselves from another person's perspective, we can certainly learn from what they see of us.

Then last week we asked ourselves if I see me the way God sees me. It's amazing to me how many references to mirrors I found this past week; and the reflection that the mirror of the world often projects upon us in ways that leave us insecure. So we learned last week that God sees us through Christ, so that we understand we are accepted and loved and in turn can as Philippians 4:13 says: do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

Now the climate influencer that we are going to talk about today is something that all of us have some experience with: conflict. Let's just see a show of hands this morning if you've experienced conflict in a relationship. Good, that's everybody.

Now there is something else we all know; when conflict is addressed, resolved and we work through it, the climate of the relationship, whatever the relationship, gets better. We also know that the opposite is true; when conflict isn't addressed, when it is ignored, and when it is not resolved; the climate of the relationship grows cold.

In the premarital counseling that I do with couples I always ask them about conflict in their relationship. The discussion is always interesting to say the least. Then I talk about how we fear conflict; and how growing relationships involve learning how to resolve conflict not escape it.

I often share the well-used analogy of the butterfly emerging from its cocoon to describe the importance of conflict. The butterfly's struggle to emerge from the cocoon is what hardens its wings and gives it a chance to fly. If the cocoon is split open to allow the butterfly out without the struggle the butterfly will never fly.

Couples who avoid conflict, who don't work to resolve the conflict in their relationship miss the opportunity to grow and strengthen their bond. So conflict isn't something to be avoided; it is something to be viewed as an opportunity for growing stronger relationships.

And learning how to properly negotiate your way through conflict not only builds stronger marriages, but also any relationship in which we find ourselves. So long as you are breathing, so long as you are in relationship, you will experience conflict. Conflict is just part of life because all of us are a little different and those differences collide sometimes and create conflict.

So today our goal isn't the absence of conflict; our goal is that when conflict happens we know what to do. So here is the bottom line for today: *The climate of your relationships improves when conflict is resolved not ignored.*

Now when it comes to conflict there are two types of people: there are conflict enjoyers and there are conflict avoiders.

**Conflict enjoyers**, and you know who you are, are sitting there saying, *I don't ignore conflict. I'm ready for conflict any time anywhere. I love to argue. I love to debate.*

Now the caution to those who are conflict enjoyers, the potential exists that you can shut the rest of us down who are on the other side of you. And when you, as a conflict enjoyer want to argue and want to get your point across be aware that you can freeze up the climate of your relationships.

Now let me say something to the **conflict avoiders**. You are the middle child in many families who just wanted everyone to get along. A conflict avoider's initial reaction when conflict happens is to take a step back and say, *Oh, it's not that big a deal...you don't need to get yourself all worked up about that.* And just as a conflict enjoyer can freeze up a relationship; a conflict avoider can keep a relationship at a surface level by failing to embrace the reality that conflict is inevitable.

Now here is where the Bible shines its wisdom on these two types of people so that in our relationships we can have a long and satisfying life. Solomon says in Proverbs 3:3

Never let *loyalty* and *kindness* get away from you! Wear them like a necklace; write them deep within your heart.

Solomon says loyalty and kindness are something that we should wear; this should be an outward adornment of our lives. But not only are loyalty and kindness for the outside; they should be planted deep inside our heart.

Then Solomon says something very important about taking loyalty and kindness into our relationships and the benefit we will reap. Look at verse 4:

Then you will find *favor* with both God and people, and you will gain a *good reputation*.

Here is something I know about all of us; we all want favor and we all want a good reputation. So Solomon tells us; with everything I've observed in life, if you get Proverbs 3:3 right, then more than likely you'll experience Proverbs 3:4.

So let's look at these two key words, loyalty and kindness, and what they can teach us as conflict avoiders and conflict enjoyers.

*Loyalty*. To a conflict avoider, conflict says *I'm being disloyal to the person on the other side of me*. So the conflict avoider thinks if I avoid conflict then I am remaining loyal to the person on the other side of me. But the exact opposite is true. Resolving conflict, having the difficult conversations, understanding that there may be hurt and pain in the process; that is true loyalty.

You see conflict avoiders need to understand that there is a time and place where loyalty demands that you engage and fight for the relationship. In a marriage that means that your spouse needs to know that you are willing to fight for the marriage and that means fighting *in* the marriage.

If your constant approach to conflict is, *I'm not going to talk about it*, you are being disloyal. So if you are a conflict avoider, here is what you need to start thinking: I'd rather be bad at conflict than disloyal. Conflict avoiders need to engage when you feel the tug to step back from the relationship. Engage with the desire to be loyal to the people in the relationship.

Ok, let's make the transition to those who are conflict enjoyers. And Solomon's word to you is *kindness*. Sounds a little wimpy for conflict enjoyers; but pay attention for a moment without getting argumentative.

There is a very simple skill I want you to hear this morning. The late Stephen Covey put it like this: I'm going to seek first to understand before being understood. That is a principle that applies to the workplace, to your marriage, to parenting; whatever relationship you are engaged in.

So conflict enjoyers need to think like this: I want to hear as much as be heard. I've got something to say- I'll get on my soapbox in a little bit; but I'm going to let you go first. I want to hear, and so I'm going to let you go first so that I can listen. That is kindness.

Conflict enjoyers need to understand that one of the things that has damaged the forecast for your relationships is your tendency to speak first. People have learned that once you speak, you are right, end of story. So extending kindness is as simple as learning to listen and let the other person speak first.

Loyalty and kindness; a truth as old as Solomon, and just as wise for those of us living nearly 3,000 years later. If you'll extend loyalty, and be loyal to the relationship and if you'll extend kindness, then you're going to create a great climate for those on the other side of you.

So each week I've been challenging you to take a step to improve the forecast of your relationships. This week is no different. Here is what I want you to do: Ask God to lay on your heart and mind a person where you know you the climate needs a change. Then here is what I want you to do with that individual. Sit down and tell them: you know what, I want to get this relationship right. And while there may have been some conflict in the past; I'm here today to show you loyalty and kindness.

For some of you that sounds scarier than asking someone what's it like on the other side of me. But then fighting for a relationship requires courage. It requires you to engage in the hard and complicated work of resolving conflict.

Can you imagine what the world would say about Christians if we stopped arguing with everyone and sought first to listen and demonstrate kindness and then seek to show loyalty to individuals by saying that the relationship is more important than the issue? Can you imagine what your workplace, your home, your neighborhood would be like if you start fighting for the relationship and not just fighting?

Loyalty and kindness; that is the solution to finding favor with God and people and gaining a good reputation. Long and satisfying relationships are available to those individuals who will wear loyalty and kindness like a necklace and write it deep within your heart.

Today is the day to begin fighting for your relationships, for your reputation, for favor and for long and satisfying relationships simply by learning two words: loyalty and kindness.