



Part 3– A Matter of Life and Death
Winning Friends, Not Arguments
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Today – A matter of life and Death, we are *winning friends, not arguments*.

No hands raised, but how many of you maybe have lost a close friendship because you let a disagreement turn into an argument and that argument was never dealt with? That quarrel, that fight that maybe could have been worked through to see what could happen... Maybe right now you are in the middle of that with a family member, someone that you've been close to, but maybe something was said at a family gathering or over the holidays that offended you or hurt you and you haven't talked to that person since. Maybe now, months and months later, you're sitting there going, *where did it even start, how did it get this bad*.

Today, we are going to talk about what it means, as a follower of Jesus, to be a peace maker. We are called to be peace makers. Not just keep the peace, but actually to pursue it, to go after it.

Matthew 5: 9 we read, ***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*** As believers, we are not social reformers. We are those who have been redeemed. We are now at peace with God. That's what it means. Jesus is the mediator between God and man. I have peace with God and then that gives me the opportunity and everything I need to go pursue peace with fellow man and with believers.

John Piper puts it this way, *"God is a peace-loving God and a peace-making God. The whole history of redemption, climaxing in the death and resurrection of Jesus is God's strategy to bring about a just and lasting peace between rebel man and himself. And then between man and his fellow man."*

God's Children have the character of their Father. What he loves, we love. What he pursues, we pursue. You can know his children by whether they are willing to make sacrifices for peace the way God did. Can I say that again? It's not something we are seeing a lot practiced in the church today or among believers today.

I'm going to make it personal for Ya'll. I'll paraphrase the quote. "Are you known as a child of God by the way you are willing to make sacrifices for peace the way God made a sacrifice for you and for me?" If he is a peace maker, then his children who have his nature, will be peace makers too.

In Romans 14: 19, we read ¹⁹Let us... The word us there is referring to believers. It's not a verse for all mankind, it's a verse for believers in Christ Jesus. ***make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*** How many can say amen to this: You're never going to stumble into peace and unity. It's something you go after, it's something you pursue, it's something you make every effort toward. It's something you are intentional with.

I heard this great question on the radio last week. I laughed out loud at first, but then I had to answer it for myself. And I want you to answer it. Here was the exact question from the radio: *If you found a book that had everything ever said about you and every person who said it, would you read it?*

Raise your hand if you say absolutely no way. I ain't reading that book. How many said, immediately I'm reading that book? I don't know how you have the guts to do that. Couldn't do it. I could not do it.

About 20 years ago, I was at Panera Bread waiting on a meeting. The person I was supposed to be meeting with was bringing someone to introduce to me, and we were just going to have coffee. We got our wires crossed. So, while I was at Panera, they went to the church office. At this time, the church office was behind Music City Center in a house.

I was sitting there for a few minutes after the time thinking to myself, *how rude. They should be here.* And then, this person calls me and for some reason my phone doesn't pick up, so it goes to voice mail. This person leaves me a voice mail, "Hey Ted, we're here at the office waiting on you. Don't know what happened or where you are, but we are going to wait here for you." And then they thought they hung up the phone. This is worse than a butt dial if you know what I'm talking about. They sat the phone down in their car and then this person, who I guess would be in the driver's seat, went at me to this other person. I had it all on Voice mail. I mean I don't think... Now, listen, I know there probably have been some things said about me over the years that were negative, not positive, but when you hear it and in an angry voice...

I get an alert that I got a voice mail so I listen to the voice mail. I get it and I go to hang up... how many of you when a friend butt dials you, you know the right thing to do is hang up? How many of you know that's the right thing to do? How many of you are like "No, we need to know the truth?" I've learned my lesson. I went to hang up and I realized this person was still talking and I listened to the whole thing, and it was harsh. It was coming at me, and it wasn't just what happened about missing this meeting or having our wires crossed, it was everything I had done wrong and every thing they didn't like about me.

So, I called the person back and said, "I'm at Panera. I can come to you, or you can come to me. "Will be there in a minute, Ted. No problem." They get there and I don't tell them what happened. This person ,20 years later, is still a member of our church. We're still friends and that person doesn't even know about what I'm talking about right now. What I love about this is there are four or five people in here right now going, *I've had coffee at Panera with Ted...* And now they're starting to go through the timeline. *We came here about 15 years ago. I think we're safe.* This person is still here, and I love this person.

You're like, "You should have said something," but the things I would have said I don't think that person would be here right now. I can say some things. I have them all written down right here. But here's what I want to tell you. I love this person too much and I can't judge them because I've done the exact same thing. But I'm smart enough to know how to hang up a phone. Let's go there for a second because some of you are like, *I speak nothing but kind words and positive words.* I know people would say, "well, you know what? I've just been hurt by people. I've been hurt by people in the church.

Unity is not easy. And I know church hurt is a very popular term right now, but I want to tell you, If I left the church or gave up on the local church every time someone hurt my feelings, I wouldn't be here right now. I'd leave today. And then guess what? Next Sunday I'd probably leave again, and then again, and then again.

Pastor Josh Howerton from Dallas, I love what he said, I heard it this week. *"Don't let what a few people did to you keep you from what Jesus did for you."*

I just want to encourage you. Don't let what a few people have said about you or to you, don't let what a few people did or said hurt your feeling, don't take it out on all other believers. Don't take it out on the local church,

Now that we are there, I want you to be thinking about some of the struggles you've had with believers. It's not just believers we're talking about today because we're going to learn how to be better peace makers. The scripture has a lot to say for us on how we can avoid quarrels and not turn every disagreement into a fight. How not to turn everything we may disagree on... And guess what? Do you know how many opinions there are in this church? Things were done and said already today that your like, *I wouldn't do it that way. I would do it this way. He did it that way.* There are so many different opinions, but we don't have to let disagreements turn into quarrels. We don't have to let our differences make us quarrelsome people.

Our differences we can't do anything about. I have a different personality than you. You have a different personality than the person you're sitting next to. Those are differences. We can't really do anything about differences all the time or even disagreements, but we have everything to do with whether or not we enter into a quarrel, or we become quarrelsome people. When a believer hurts your feelings, don't take it out on all believers.

I love Ephesians 4. Ephesians is rich in theology as you start reading this book and as you work toward the end of the book, Paul gets into all of this practical application. By the time you get to Chapter 5, we're talking marriage. And we're into parenting and family in Chapter 6 – putting on the full armor of God, but it gets very, very practical.

Here's what we read in Chapter 4: 1, ***As a prisoner for the Lord then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.***

I want you to take everything you say you believe and put it into practice.

In Verse 2, we get what Jesus has modeled for us. ***Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love.*** We don't use that term a lot in our culture – bearing with one another. You know what we use? We use “putting up with people.” That's probably better understanding. And I would rather you put up with someone than give up on someone. Too many people today are getting their feelings hurt, not maturing in their faith, and not maturing in their relationships, and they are giving up on people, rather than bearing with or putting up with people. What does it mean to bear with another in love? Well, be patient with the shortcomings of others. People are not always going to measure up to our expectations for them. And in those moments, we bear with one another.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit. Unity is not something that happens, it's something we work for, it's something we put energy and time into through the bond of peace.

Look at how many times we get this oneness that we are to have. Then we're going to look at what it means to be like-minded. What does it mean to be on mission as a church together? There is one body, one spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all.

So, here's the question. What does it mean to be like-minded? I'm looking around the room at a lot of friends that I have in this church, people I love dearly, love spending time with, and we are likeminded, and we are so different. I think this is what makes the church so rich. This is what I love about marriage. Amy and I are like-minded and so different. Last week, she got a new calendar. You have to see my wife when she gets a bland calendar, and she opens it up and you can just see it all over her. She like, Isn't this amazing? I have this white space. And I see her holding every color pen you can imagine. She's like, *the world is wide open to us*. She is just ready to go, writing in this thing. She's so excited.

I'm not that way at all. I don't keep a calendar. It's why I was at Panera. But we are so different in ... If I ever want to be romantic with my wife, I just kind of quote for her Steven Covey Time management quotes. She like Oh, that's so good. But that's just not me. And yet, Amy and I are like-minded. And we are on mission together. We are pursuing oneness and unity in marriage.

Here's the bottom line... And the church needs to understand this, denominations need to understand this. The denomination I grew up in did not understand this.

Unity does not require unanimity. Meaning it does mean we agree on everything.

I met with a believer this week. We disagree on the second amendment. And guess what? We are still like-minded in this church. Some of you are like, really?? You hear Shay even say it. He loves the second amendment. I love the second amendment. I have weapons. I have firearms. There's a debate that always pops up around our country. The Constitution is not where I find my like-mindedness with believers in Christ Jesus. I find it through scripture and through unity. It says one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God. That is our unity and the essential beliefs. So, it's okay.

When what happened up north at a church during the Men's Conference. People are like, "What do you think? Well, what do you think? We can all get along. It happened; it didn't even happen down here. We can even disagree on what happened and how it was handled and still be like minded.

We don't always think alike, do we Kent? No, we don't. One of my dearest friends in this church and guess what? We have differences of opinion. But guess what? I'm likeminded with that brother right there. And we don't have to look alike. Unity does not require uniformity. We don't have to wear the same denim. We don't have to wear our hair the exact same way. We don't have to wear the same-colored shirt. You know what I'm talking about. Unity doesn't require unanimity and uniformity. In other words, as believers, not all Christians look alike and think alike. You see it up here on display for you all the time. Our teaching team. We are like-minded. We have unity. We love one another, we care for one another, we help each other, we are open to feedback from one another.

Adam speaks next week. I don't know if you know this. Adam and I are very different. I'm the athlete, he's the one that kind of sluffs off a little bit and doesn't take his workout seriously. But you get it. Dear brothers, friends, we're like-minded and we can go at each other and have differences, but we're on mission together. We don't have to look alike; we don't always have to talk alike. And the only way it works is if I appreciate the contribution of another and they appreciate my contribution. That's what we need to have this unity.

I have a friend who, years ago, came to faith in this church, but then as he looked around, he just felt like he didn't fit in. I asked him to help me understand that. He goes, "I don't look like everybody there. I'm like, "Have you looked around? I don't think you've looked hard enough. Because as I look around this room, there are differences, we have diversity. There are times I wish we had far more diversity because it makes us stronger. Not all Christians look alike, not all Christians think alike. We are going to disagree. We'll see that in a second. **A different way is not the wrong way.** They teach us this in marriage all the time. This is true except for loading the dishwasher. You've heard me say this. There is only one way to load a dishwasher and that's my way, the manufacturer's recommended loading instructions. Some of you are barbarians when you load that thing.

But we have to understand that being like-minded in the church means we have unity first and foremost in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We believe the scripture. This is the holy, infallible, inspired Word of God. We believe it is the inherent Word of God. We believe, as we just went through the Revelation series, Jesus is going to return to earth one day and we are longing for that day. These are what we call essentials. We are on mission together. Part of being on mission as a church and having unity together is we want other people to know who Jesus is. It's why we share our faith boldly.

That's the message. The methods are different. I just got back this week from a marriage collective. I love this marriage collective. It's the Cathy family at Winshape in Atlanta. They gather marriage and family people that are champions and want to get out there and do as much as we can in the world for marriage and family. They gather like 80 of us with spouses. I've loved this event for years because it's a great place to connect with colleagues and like-minded people. But it's taken a change and Amy and I are just sitting there this week listening to talks.

And a lot more millennials marriage influencers are finding their way in and referring to me ... I am the young person in the room. But now they are looking at me as the old guy. They even referred to me as that once. And I was like wait what. I looked at Amy and I go, "We're not the old people." We are the old people in the room. I told them when I left, "I would like to do a session next year called Get Off my Lawn - Who do you think you are." But as I was listening for their ways of ministering to the marriages in their generation, I was sitting there going *Wow, that's not how I think at all. That's not how I would do it at all.*

Their methods... I confessed to a friend of mine, I said, "I have a really hard time watching some of the reels of some of these folks. It just overwhelms me. Then he asked me "Is it the content you're struggling with or the form? I go, "Shut up." "It's all of it." No, no, no. is the content true? Are they giving scripture?" He said, "Ted, this is why you're the old man in the room and if you're not careful, you'll become old and irrelevant.

That really got me thinking because what they're saying is good. They are doing it in a form that I don't relate to. This is what I love about our church. Look around the room at the multi generations that you see here. It's better at 10:00 than at 8:15.

If you are a get off my lawn type of guy, I want you to first ask the question, *Is what this person is saying and the way they're doing it true.*

Is what they are saying true because there is a big difference between message and methods. This is where I want to brag a moment on Katie Gumm. Katie was just up here giving the announcement. Katie has the most open posture toward feedback of anybody I know. It's inspiring. I want what she has because after the 8:15, we go back there and start ripping things apart with ways we can do things better. She is just so open, and she receives it so well. I just wish all of us could have that open of a posture, but because she is coming at it from the perspective that there are a lot of different ways to do things, even in the church. So long as the messages never changes... That's the key for us. Ron, are you prepared for that. Yeah, you're a get off my lawn guy with me. We've got to be very careful because you know what we're doing. We're turning the keys over to the next generation. We're saying run, run. And we are going to cheer you on, and 20 years from now, I'm going to be the guy back there going, "We want more Tomlin!"

Let's get very practical with this. This is key. We might disagree, but we don't have to quarrel. This is a choice we've got to start getting comfortable with because Arty and I are going to have a conversation after this service. You might as well join us. We are going to work through all of our instruments.

Proverbs 15: 18 – ***A hot tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.***

You've heard this verse before and you've heard the illustration, it's too powerful. I can't think of a better illustration. When you walk into a room that's heated, and there's a quarrel taking place... it's not even your quarrel maybe. You walk into it – are you a thermometer or a thermostat? A thermometer takes the temperature. A thermostat changes the temperature. And as peacemakers, we want to walk into rooms, whether the quarrels on us or not, and be that one that can bring down the temperature. Another way of saying calming a quarrel.

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

This illustration works in Branson because we honor our military heroes in this town. And when you think about the military heroes and what they were able to go and do, look at what Proverbs is saying. Better a patient person than the warrior who returns home to the applause. That is the level of skill and the level of strength we are talking about. A patient person with self-control.

In Philippians 2... before we get to Verses 14 and 16, know the context of this passage we're going to be looking at in Philippians 2, we are told to do nothing with selfish ambition or vain conceit. Instead, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but to the interest of others. And that we should have the same mind that is in Christ Jesus. What is that mindset. That who being in the very nature of God, did not see it as something to be grasped. But instead, he emptied himself. That is our model. That is what we are called to.

And now look at Verse 14. Paul follows that up with Do everything without grumbling or arguing,

That's the test, to know if you are taking on the mindset of Christ. If you're a quarrelsome person, if you're grumbling all the time, if you're arguing all the time, if you're fighting all the time, take on the mind of Christ. Go back to the exhortation in Verses 3 and 4 of this chapter. ***Do nothing with selfish ambition or vain conceit. Look to the interest of others. Do everything without grumbling or arguing,***

Verse 15. ***So that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.*** In other words, when it comes to disagreement, we don't take the approach of the world. That's not how we operate. We are to shine in the darkness. That's why he says, ***"Shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life and then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain."***

Proverbs 20: 3 says, ***It is to one's honor to avoid strife for fools are quick to quarrel***

Maybe you have some fools in your life right now that are trying to engage you in a fight. Be patient, be the gentle, be the thermostat, be the one that steps in and calms the quarrel.

I know sometimes you'll hear counselors say to avoiding strife. This is not what we refer to in counseling as withdrawal. That's not at all it, but there are plenty of times in marriage you have the opportunity to let that disagreement turn into a quarrel or just to avoid the strife altogether.

Sometimes a counselor will say you're just avoiding conflict. You're not avoiding conflict, you're just saying *I'm going to overlook this. This isn't worth me losing a night's sleep over.*

So, when they tell me I'm avoiding conflict, I go back... It's actually in Proverbs, the Bible, God's word says it's to one's honor to do so.

Proverbs 26: 17, ***Like one who grabs a stray dog by the ears.*** That was written for the Ozarks right there. What happens to you if you grab a stray dog by the ears? You get bit. That's the word picture we get for... that's the same person who rushes into a quarrel not their own.

So, don't go looking for these quarrels. Don't turn every disagreement into a quarrel. If a quarrel breaks out, be the one that calms it down.

Be aligned on the big issues. We call those essentials in our church. And let the little things go. I love how Chuck Swindoll put it years ago. He said, *"The reason we preach from the Bible and want you to know your Bible..."* which is a series we're going into for the next three week. *The reason we want you to know this so well is you should be able to form opinions and make decisions for your life without waiting for me to chime in on it."*

We live in this day where we feel like pastors have to say something about everything. It's just not true. If you are reading your Bible and studying and growing in it. You should come to some conclusions on your own. Church Swindoll told his church this all the time. Don't wait for me, go to the Lord. You have the source.

Parents love to do this to me. Something they've been debating with their teenagers. Could you do a sermon on Tattoos? Listen, I can almost guarantee you this. So long as I'm the lead pastor here, you'll never get an entire sermon on tattoos. People will be like, "Can we talk about Yoga?" "Can we talk about Men's Conferences?" "Can we talk about worship stiles?" "Can we talk about hair styles." People want you to speak into all of it. I just found great joy... Amy and I went through an exercise a couple of months ago on discovering our mission, our marriage mission, like what are we passionate about. We got serious about it, we have our list of core values and it's interesting because if it doesn't fit in there, it's almost like we're not even engaging in it anymore. You've heard me talk about this quite a bit. Walk away. Save your energy and influence for what matters most.

Too many churches split, not over the big issues, but over the little things. The little disagreements that people have.

What does the scripture say in Romans 14: 1? ***accept the one whose faith is weak without quarreling over disputable matters.***

I think it's interesting that too many people try to work through and rid the church of disputable matters. I don't think you are going to ever rid the church of disputable matters, but you do get to make the choice whether or not you quarrel about them. That's your choice.

Proverbs 17: 14 – ***Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam.*** Another way of looking at this is if I had a glass of water up here and spilled it trying to get all that water, all of it, back in this glass. It would be nearly impossible. This proverb says Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam, so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

In other words, we've all been there where we say or do something that we regret in the quarrel. And we wish we never would have said that. So, just drop the matter. Scripture is clear. Avoid conflict, drop the matter.

Titus 3: 1 and 2 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, Paul says to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one to be peaceable and considerate and always be gentle toward everyone.

I share this often when I'm working with business leaders. I do this even with CEO's to encourage them in their marriage and family. It's always something to me when they're killing it at work, like, doing a great job in whatever they are called to do, and their company is doing very well, but then they go home. This is where I get involved. They're like, I can't understand why this is happening. Why he, why she. I'm just really struggling. I always love to tell them. I didn't this Friday night. A CEO came up to me and said, "I'm just struggling with this one thing." I'm able to tell him. I tell all of them the same thing. You already have every skill you need to crush it at home. You already have all the tools because you do it at work all day long. And then you get home and for some reason, what you did to crush in your job, and to crush it at work, and to be successful and to have good relationships. You get home and you just kind of turn it all off. That doesn't make any sense because we know this: the family room and the boardroom are linked. The skills that make one great, make the other great.

Let's talk about it from a business side and then a home side really quickly. What happens if you have a quarrel at work? You have two employees, two team members that are not getting along. What do you do if you're the boss, if you're the leader.

Number 1, you call a meeting. Some of you are like “I don’t that’s why everybody leaves,” I would encourage you. If you are having a quarrel at work right now, you call a meeting. Or I would even say all of this applies to just any problem you’re dealing with. I have friends that had businesses during the pandemic. Sales started to go up for a while with these things, but then they had a problem getting parts. Everybody knows we’re kind of still dealing with that. What do you do? Do you just shut your business down? No, you call a meeting.

2. Ask a lot of questions. That’s how every good meeting should start. I’m trying to get understanding. Travis Brawner brought this up. He goes, “You’ve seen the Tim Hawkins bit where he goes, *“I’ve been told if you have a marriage problem, you’re supposed to call a meeting and ask great questions.”* He said, *“So I tried that the other day. I called my wife into the room. We weren’t getting along, and you’re supposed to do it calmly, gently, patiently, I just looked at her and said, “Why are you acting so psycho?”*”

That’s not what I’m talking about, right?

You ask a lot of Questions because you don’t want to start solving something if you don’t have enough information.

3. Identify the problem. What’s the real problem? A lot of times, you’re like the problem is the person in the meeting. The problem is the person that I called.

4. Avoid blaming. We know that great leaders take the blame and give the credit. It does nothing... If you’ve been in these meetings that are like, “We have a problem at work and it’s, “Who’s fault is it?” Where do you go from there? How much does that solve.

5. Seek outside help. How many of you in your business got stuck somewhere and you had to hire a consultant. Something was happening with the money, so you hired an accountant. You hired a CPA or whatever. You got help for things you didn’t know. Many of you have never done your own taxes because you like your freedom. You don’t want to be in jail. You hire experts that can help you with it.

6. implement creative solutions. This is what makes that entrepreneuring spirit so much fun.

7. Allocate resources to fix it.

8. Check back in for a follow up. Now you have a quarrel with a friend. I talk to a couple of people after 8: 15. One of them said it started this morning. Someone was kind of baiting me into a fight and it started, and we're all spun up. I was like, "Well then, you've got this afternoon, this is a dear friendship that you want and it's not a disagreement. Again, I don't think you should do all this for every disagreement you have at work with every single person you work with. You will never get anything done. I'm talking about when disagreement turns into a quarrel, turns into a fight, and the fire has been stoked.

When you go home, do the exact same thing you did at work. If it's with a child, if it's with your spouse, call a meeting. Say, "Honey, after dinner, can we talk?" And then sit down and keep your dang mouth shut. Ask a lot of questions, get understanding, validate with your spouse. Empathize with what's going on. You know, say, "You're hurting and that matters to me. I want to talk this through with you." Avoid blaming, stop pointing your fingers.

Next time you point your fingers at your spouse, just fire your spouse as the source of your life. Your spouse is not your source. Seek outside help. If you are so stuck or at such a level of crisis, I want to tell you to get a counselor, go to a marriage intensive, which (7) you will have to allocate resources for. The church helps with this. We love to help with this, but we want you to put skin in the game. Implement creative solutions and then check back in for a follow up.

We want to be people that pursue peace, that seek unity, that don't just sit around and wait for it, but we go after it.

Father, in the name of Jesus, thank you for this church. I am grateful for talks like this where we can get ahead of the disputable matters and issues that so often can plague a church. Give us wisdom and discernment as we work toward one another. For home groups and for the classes starting up and as scripture is discussed and as life is worked through, that we would bear with one another, be patient with one another, being gentle with one another, and learning to not let the disagreement turn into quarrels.

For the one who has never placed fait in Jesus, that today would be the day of their salvation. That they would confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believes in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved.

We pray this in the authority of the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen