

A Heart of War or A Heart of Peace?

A Travel Free Learning Article

by

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I am an NFL football fan, and I am not happy. This dispute between the owners and the players has led to an enormous amount of bickering and bantering in the press and threatens to disrupt the start of the next professional football season. Radio and television commentators talk about the work stoppage being a dispute between billionaires and millionaires. What really distresses me is my perception of a major gulf between the owners and players. They really do not like each other and seem determined to hold their positions. They are operating with a heart of war rather than a heart of peace.

The unfortunate thing that I see is that many churches operate with the same mentality. The positions are not developed over money much of the time, but still church people start their conversations with a heart at war. Many things can create that type of mentality – perceived loss of control, poor relationships, lack of crucial relationship skills, the rate of change, and more. While every church will have a little conflict as they live life in the 21st century, many churches do not have the skills to handle the emotions that revolve around the disagreements. Church members develop a heart of war in their relationship with their pastor and staff. We pastors can be just as guilty of thinking we are at war with leaders who disagree with us. We may not be that much different than the billionaires and millionaires in the NFL war.

Recently, in working with a congregation that was going through some of these emotional challenges in their transition with a new pastor, I discovered a resource published by the Arbinger Institute called ***The Anatomy of Peace***. The book discusses the challenge of living in a divided world in our relationships. While admittedly not written just as a Christian resource, there were some valuable insights for me in my world of building and maintaining relationships in families, organizations, churches, and nations. Here are some of my ponderings as I reflect on this resource:

1. Our behaviors are a direct result of our heart. People with a heart of war look at others as objects, enemies, obstacles to their goals, and irrelevant. Listen to the conversation between the NFL owners and their players. Their behavior is a result of their heart. Those with a heart of peace see others as people with hopes, dreams, and fears just like them. They still have conflict with others, but they begin the conversation with a different end in mind. Think about church. Where does your conversation with others begin? What does your behavior show? In our post-original sin world, I think we have a bent toward a heart of war, but thank God for His grace in our life. Jesus reminded us in the Beatitudes, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)
2. When we make the choice to have a heart of war in our relationships with others, we justify our behavior. The NFL owners justify their behavior by saying that they are standing firm to protect the game of football. The players justify by saying that the owners are taking advantage of them and treating them like slaves. And the language goes on. We do the same in church. We justify our behavior by appealing to our elected position, our God-given goals, our history, our tradition, and more. We box ourselves in and create enormous disadvantage to living the Great Commandment and Great Commission.
3. Four common justification boxes in which pastors and church members live when they are behaving in a heart of war position are:
 - The *Better Than Box* – I am more important than others and am right in my view. Others are inferior, incapable, and irrelevant to the cause.

- The *Must Be Seen As Box* – I need to be well thought of by others, or I need to fake what I believe and what I say for others to see me in a good manner. Others are dangerous and are judgmental toward me. I am stressed and overwhelmed by what comes my way.
 - The *Worse Than Box* – I am inferior to others, and my skills are deficient. Others, therefore, are privileged and blessed. I must fight my way with others to prove my worth.
 - The *I Deserve Box* – I am mistreated and a victim of my circumstances. Others mistreat me. I have been deprived, and I am resentful of the way I am treated.
4. How do we change our hearts to a heart of peace in our relationships?
- a. You begin by checking your heart and ask God to help you see in what justification box you are living. Look for signs of the justification boxes showing up in your story. Then a good dose of confession and God's forgiveness will help you move toward a heart of peace.
 - b. Go to a place where you can recover this peacemaking spirit in your life. The authors of *The Anatomy of Peace* suggest this place could be recalling a favorite memory of peace in your life or finding a special person who helps bring peace in your journey or remembering a passage from a book that is helpful. King Saul in his torment find the music of a harp calmed his spirit. What is that place, memory, person, or music that helps you get out of your justification box?
 - c. Ponder the situation you are facing with a new perspective. Ask these types of questions about the person or persons with which you are at war:
 - What are this person's challenges, burdens, and pains?
 - How am I adding to these challenges, etc?
 - How have I or my group neglected or mistreated this person?
 - In what ways are my boxes obscuring the truth about others?
 - What am I feeling I should do for this person or group?
 - d. Act upon what you have discovered that will contribute to a heart of peace.

All of this sounds *Pollyanna* even as I write it. Relationships are very complicated. Living in a post-original sin world creates unique challenges even for people who have experienced the grace of God in our lives. We will not do away with disagreements and disappointments, but how we approach each other when we have these challenges becomes important. Do we see each other as people who are created in the image of God, who have hopes and dreams for God's Kingdom, just like we do? Or do we see them as our enemies and adversaries? For a broken world, we serve as a model of what relationships can be when we have the heart of peace the Lord provides. How are your relationships with your other church members? How is your relationship with your pastor? How is your relationship with your church staff? How is your relationship with your non-Christian neighbor? Do you have a heart of peace or a heart of war?

Note: Of course, the book, *Every Congregation Needs a Little Conflict*, by my ministry colleague, George Bullard, provides an excellent resource on navigating the conflict process in congregations. I urge you to buy it by going to the [TCP Resources Store](#), www.ChalicePress.com, or www.Amazon.com.

Note: Join us Wednesday, March 30th at 2:00 p.m. EDT for the Travel Free Learning Dialogue as we discuss these relationship principles and what your heart represents. If you miss this live dialogue, go to www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org and the Travel Free Learning Dialogues link to listen to the recording of this session.

Important Things to Know

Ken Kessler is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership. He is also on staff with the Virginia Baptist Mission Board. The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. *Travel Free Learning* is a knowledge sharing emphasis. For more information about products and services check out the web site at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org, send an e-mail to Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org, or call 803.622.0923.