

The Way of the Lord

27. Passive Aggression: An UnChristlike Response (Part 4)

In our book *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation*, we explain that people generally have interpersonal tensions in any of 4 areas: *goals, values, methods, or facts*. Of these four areas, the failure to *mutually* work through and establish *goals and values* in a relationship often results in a lot of unnecessary emotional pain. Quite often, the relationship may even end because of that.

People are far more emotionally attached to their personal goals and values than to any other area of potential disagreement. And yet, goals and values are rarely discussed when intimate or close relationships begin to form. Too much is taken for granted, and often it's because of *deep-seated passive aggression*. They're reluctant to work through the process of establishing mutual goals and values—the things that *should* be most important to them. They resist any changes they may have to make, or fear the responsibilities on their part that shared goals and values might demand of them.

While our *own* goals and values claim our deepest convictions and emotions, because of passive aggression we hide them away. Goals and values answer the question of *why* your relationship exists. They're what you consider precious or important in the relationship, and reflect your deepest heart motives—what makes you do and act as you do. Establishing mutual goals and values affirms each other's dignity. When followers of Jesus readily work through their goals and values for their marriages, friendships, and with others in their faith family, they're upholding one another's dignity *and* allowing the love of Jesus to blossom among them.

We have several insights to help deepen trust and dignity in your close and intimate relationships. The first one is especially for men: Whenever you're planning to do something that will *significantly impact* the lives of your family or others close to you, *ask for the input* of those who will be affected by your plans. Use your decision making processes to uphold the dignity of the people who'll be affected.

A reliable sign that you don't need to be in control is your willingness to ask others for their input *before* you act. When you purposely uphold someone's dignity by seeking their input, you're encouraging them that they can have confidence in you. When you ask people what *they* think, you're able to mutually benefit from each other's spiritual giftings, gender differences, life experiences, and even personal preferences that may be different than yours. And when you ask for others' input, they get the opportunity to take ownership of the goal, and to embrace the values regarding that goal.

I'd like to address men here. If you're determined to be the Christ-like husband and father our Lord wants you to be, we have a graphic that may help you have *His* perspective of your role in your home. Keep in mind that everything about being like Jesus and leading your family begins with *humility*: "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Your attitude should be **the same as that of Christ Jesus***" (Philippians 2:3,5).

Picture yourself as part of the *basement* of your home. Putting into practice your Christ-like character qualities and your ability to lead your home begins on your

knees. As you see yourself humbly *undergirding* your family, you'll grow in authentic, Christ-like *servant/leadership*. A *humble* man is far more likely to impart Christ's character qualities into his family.

Children also need to see mutual humility and love *between their parents* as they work through their differences together. Parents make real for their kids the indwelling Spirit of Christ as they help each other rid themselves of passive aggressive symptoms—especially independent resistance and failure to take responsibility.

One of the greatest gifts you can give your children is for you as parents to support each other's dignity, and to mutually pursue Christlike character qualities. Remember, dignity is a *morale* issue—something you experience that encourages and uplifts you. And we who follow Jesus as our Lord should be at the forefront of upholding the dignity of others. They're made in God's image, and our Lord Jesus shed His blood for them.

If you want to instill trust in your children as they're growing up, it's important to their character development that you refrain from habitually *negotiating with them* or *cajoling them* to obey you. That sort of manipulation is training them to be passive aggressive. They'll grow up with a *resistant attitude* and a need to be *in control*. And that child will *distrust God* as well as others who have a right to be trusted.

As we conclude our discussion on passive aggressive behavior, we encourage you to review the symptoms you identified under the strongholds you've demolished. With the help of someone close to you, cooperate in helping each other until all the negative symptoms have been changed into Christ-like character qualities.

We cited in a previous segment that the biblical literacy rate has dropped from 65% to 4% in three generations' time. If Christian fathers had followed through in their responsibility to train their children according to God's Word, we wouldn't see the widespread passive aggression so common today. Nor would we need to focus so much on ridding ourselves and our marriages and families of it. I strongly encourage you husbands and fathers, *train up your families yourself* in the way they need to live for the Lord. Don't outsource them to anyone else!

If you're a wife, I encourage you to support your husband in this. And if you're single, find at least one person with whom you can mutually cooperate in ridding yourself of all passive aggressive symptoms, allowing the Holy Spirit to work Christ's character qualities in you. If you do this, you'll find the way of the Lord far more fruitful in your life as you walk together in Him.

For Further Study

- Teaching E-mail 19. *Replacing Apprehension With Love*
- Discussing How to Restore the Early Church, Lesson 43. *Godly Parenting*
- Lifebyte 73. *Stop Toxic Thoughts, Replace Toxic Memories*
- Book: *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation*

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