

7 MARKS OF TRANSFORMATION
Be Calm When Confronted by Problems
Be Committed to Grace & Truth When Working Through Conflicts
2 Kings 6:5-23; John 1:14-18

Be Calm When Confronted by Problems

In 2 Kings 6, we find Elisha remaining completely calm, even when besieged by the huge Aramean army. However, he is not the only Bible character who has displayed such calm in the face of intense hostility. Consider David and Goliath, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Daniel (Dan 3 and 6), Elijah before the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18), Stephen, before the Pharisees (Acts 8). And of course, our beloved Lord Jesus Himself. How did they do it?

Besides being calm, Elisha encouraged his aide to stop fearing, and assured him that they had behind them a force superior to that of the enemy. Elisha then asked the LORD to enable his servant to see this host and the Lord did so. He gave the servant the ability to see the normally unseen world of spiritual beings (angels) that are constantly ready to do God's bidding (cf. Gen 28:12). The hills around Dothan were filled with superior horses and chariots. These appeared as fiery agents of God, suggesting to the servant their super-terrestrial origin (cf. 2 Kgs 2:11). The LORD had surrounded the armies of Aram and was in complete control.

Pointing out another biblical example of calmness, W. Wiersbe commented that Judah's King Ahaz's heart had been wavering, and the hearts of his people had been shaking for fear (Isa 7:2) but Isaiah came with a message of assurance: "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted" (v4). How was Ahaz supposed to find this inner peace? By believing God's promise that Judah's enemies would be defeated. "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established" (v9, NKJV). Faith in God's promises is the only way to find peace in the midst of trouble. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isa 26:3, NKJV).

Suppose you are in a car race and your enemy, who does not want you to finish the race, throws mud on your windshield. The fact that you temporarily lose sight of your goal and start to swerve does not mean that you are going to quit the race. It also does not mean that you are on the wrong racetrack. Otherwise the enemy would not bother you at all. What it means is that you should turn on your windshield wipers! At first blow, our belief in God's promises may sputter and swerve. But whether we stay on track and make it to the finish line depends on whether, by grace, we set in motion a process of resistance and fight back against the unbelief of anxiety. In the face of problems, or hostility, will we turn on the windshield wipers?

Later on, when Elisha led the army into King Joram's city, he advised Joram not to kill the captured soldiers. Furthermore God's purpose was not to destroy the Arameans' lives but to save the Israelites' lives. The king then assured them of this in an unusual way. By setting a great feast before the soldiers he was expressing confidence in God's ability to control the enemy; Israel had absolutely nothing to fear and could even treat these

soldiers as friends because God had them in His sovereign power. In the ancient Near East, eating together under one's roof constituted making a covenant of peace. The Arameans were now bound by social custom not to attack the friend who had extended his gift of hospitality and protection. For these reasons the Arameans stopped raiding Israel's territory for a time. What seemed to be a hopeless battle turned out to be a peaceful solution that brought stability to the region for years, all because Elisha never took his eyes off God, or His promises.

Be Committed to Grace and Truth When Working Through Conflict

Grace is the first ingredient necessary for growing up in the image of God. Grace is unbroken, uninterrupted, unearned, accepting relationship. It is the kind of relationship God had in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were loved and provided for. They knew God's truth, and they had perfect freedom to do God's will. In short, they were secure; they had no shame and anxiety. They could be who they truly were. Grace then, is the relational aspect of God's character. It shows itself in His unconditional connection to us.

Truth is the second ingredient necessary for growing up in the image of God. Truth is what is real; it describes how things really are. Just as grace is the relational aspect of God's character, truth is the structural aspect of His character. Truth is the skeleton that life hangs upon; it adds shape to everything in the universe. God's truth leads us to what is real, and accurate. Just as our DNA contains the form that our physical life will take, God's truth contains the form that our soul and spirit should take.

When we look at what the Scripture says about the law, about truth without grace, we see that the law silences us, brings anger, increases sin, arouses sinful passions, brings death, puts us under a curse, holds us prisoner, alienates us from Christ, and judges us harshly. The law without grace destroys us. No one ever grows when they are under the law, for the law put us into a strictly legal relationship with God: "I'll love you only if you do what is true and right." Getting truth before grace, or truth before relationship, brings guilt, anxiety, anger, and a host of other painful emotions.

Truth without grace is deadly, but grace without truth leads to less than successful living as well. In the same way that truth (without grace) can be called judgment, grace (without truth) can be named license. The Scriptures talk about this (see Gal 5:13, Rom 6:15-16, Col 3:5). The lack of limits in life—the lack of truth and discipline—can lead to a chaotic lifestyle.

The Bible in John 1:14-18 does not commend either truth apart from grace, nor grace apart from truth; but rather, a mixture of both. Especially in the midst of conflict – Jesus teaches in Matthew 18:15-17 how we are to exercise grace and truth in the midst of conflict. The Bible Exposition Commentary summarises it as follows:

Keep the matter private: Go to the person who sinned, and approach him/her alone. Go, with the intention to win your brother/sister, not to win the argument or point. We must have a spirit of meekness and gentleness when we seek to restore a brother or sister (Gal 6:1).

Ask for help from others: If the offender refuses to make things right, then we may feel free to share the burden with one or two dependable believers. If the brethren feel the cause is right, then together we can go to the offender and try once again to win him.

Ask the church for help: Remember, our goal is not the winning of a case but the winning of a brother. The word *gained* in Matthew 18:15 is used in 1 Corinthians 9:19–22 to refer to winning the lost; but it is also important to win the saved.

The mark of community – true, biblical unity – is not the absence of conflict. It is the presence of a reconciling spirit. I can have a rough-and-tumble leadership meeting with someone, but because we are committed to community and unity, we can still leave, slapping each other on the back, saying, “I’m glad we’re still brothers.” We know no one is bailing out just because of a conflicting position. But developing community, true biblical unity, does not happen naturally; it must be intentional.

Sources:

T.L. Constable, “2 Kings” in J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck (ed.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, Vol. 1* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985).

John Piper, *Future Grace* (Colorado Springs, CL: Multnomah Books, 1995).

Bill Hybels, “Standing in the Crossfire” in M. Shelley (ed.), *Leading Your Church Through Conflict And Reconciliation: 30 Strategies To Transform Your Ministry* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1997).

W.W. Wiersbe, *Be Comforted* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996).

W.W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996).

Questions for Cell Discussion

Question 1

Looking at the passage in 2 Kings 6:8-17, it can be observed that Elisha and his servant had very different perspectives. This accounted for their different responses to the same situation.

In your own life, have there been incidents when you felt overwhelmed by circumstances? What was your perspective when it first occurred? Share some of the Lord's promises to you that helped to calm your heart, and bring your focus back to the Lord and His power and love.

For SJSJ, can you think of the kinds of problems we may encounter in view of PSW which will need us to remain calm?

Question 2

Jesus was the epitome of grace and truth. In John 1:16-17, we read that "from His fullness, we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ".

Can you find examples of Jesus living out grace and truth in the Gospels? Discuss how He confronted someone with the truth and yet it was also done in grace.

How can we live out such grace and truth in our relationships with one another? Share your own experiences of conflicts that you have encountered, and how you resolved them with truth and grace.