

Care-front vs. Confront

Being a pastor has many challenges. We are called into a marvelous work, but the idea of confronting others is difficult. On one hand, we have a desire to please everyone while on the other hand, we encourage people to change (living closer to the Word of God) at times when they may be resistant to change.

One of our greatest challenges as a pastor is in the area of confronting. As a pastor, the spiritual leader of the church, there are times when we must confront others, especially when something is definitely contrary to the Word of God or is causing division within the church. We have discovered that most pastors feel uncomfortable in the area of confronting. We understand that issues are better to address before they become larger ones, but still there seems to be reluctance. Perhaps we need to re-think about the word **confront** or have a better understanding on how to confront others.

The word “confront” usually has negative meanings associated with it. “Someone is going to get angry, someone will lose, someone may leave the church or stop paying their tithes, confrontation may cause a division or dissention within the church creating a power struggle to see which one is the strongest, someone is going to be hurt, etc.” The list goes on and on.

So what is a pastor supposed to do? Too often we avoid confronting altogether for the sake of peace. But does that really solve anything? When we look closer at the heart of the issue(s), avoidance seems to lack vision, purpose, and is unfruitful. The enemy would like for us to keep our eyes focused on other things than on our calling and ways of improving the spiritual well-being of others. The truth is people will do dysfunctional acts, have dysfunctional thinking, perhaps never realizing it, but nevertheless bringing discourse or a lack of unity to the church. The sad thing is that many people who need help or correction are left alone to keep doing the negative type of behavior(s) over and over again to every pastor they may have. When such behavior is allowed to continue due to avoidance, pastors feel less respected and less powerful to lead the church. Avoidance never creates a healthy environment for any church to grow.

We have all heard the saying, “It is okay to disagree, but it is wrong to become disagreeable.” We can all live with the first part, “Okay to disagree”, because it has little or no emotions attached to it but we all know that becoming “disagreeable” creates all kinds of negative emotions. Wouldn’t it be great if we could eliminate all disagreements and confrontations? Perhaps the issue lies on how we approach confronting. As the shepherd or spiritual leader of the church, it is our duty to correct, guide, and lead the church in the appropriate direction. A ship and its captain may experience a storm or tempest from now and then with the ship being

tossed to and fro. If the captain gives up or lets go of the helm, the ship and those aboard could perish. Through experience, the captain knows to steer his ship directly into the wind where the tempest is blowing in order to stay on course and reach its destination. Every pastor, as the spiritual leader, must steer his/her vessel (the church) in a direction that lines up to God's Word and to the vision that the Lord has given to him/her. Too often people and even pastors try to steer the church down a path or direction God is simply not leading or perhaps using the wrong approach.

So how do we confront? First of all, we must examine ourselves. The key to solving any issue or confronting others is contingent upon our approach. It is simply a matter of us exercising the right heart, mind, and spirit on any troubling issue(s). One cannot objectively approach anything when he/she is mentally diverted or is so focused on the issue or person, stirring up his/her own emotions to the point of not seeing the "whole" ministry picture, sometimes allowing one's own carnal thinking or actions to take control. God needs to be in control! He is the captain of our ship. Another poor approach is when a pastor uses authoritative control by stating, "This is my church! I am the pastor!, etc." ruling with a haughty spirit, allowing anger or force to get his/her way, displaying arrogance, pride, or a poor attitude that does nothing to promote God's work. We all know that this approach is wrong and displays "stinking thinking" on our part. It may be good to remind ourselves who we may be wrestling with: Ephesians 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." We are not wrestling against a person, even though the actions may manifest itself through a person.

Where to confront? By using your office, this may present a defensive-environment for the person you are intending to visit. I am reminded about the movie, "A wonderful life" where Mr. Potter invites Jimmy Stewart into his office with his office towering over the chairs in front of it. You could choose, however, a restaurant or perhaps their home that would bring a safe environment for them and make it seem as if it is a home visit.

Your ministry, as with every other ministry, could experience a rough season when events, situations, or people are magnified as big as giants or Goliaths. A simple word of wisdom...If you avoid or run away from your giant, you will often face them later. Secondly, God never promised that your ministry would be easy. He simply called us to obedience, not one of comfort. Thirdly, He promised that He will never leave nor forsake us. He is always there if we listen and submit wholly to Him. Stay true to the Course!

Here is a great Question: Every time Jesus was confronted with an issue or problem, how did he approach them? Answer: He did not "avoid" them but addressed the issue. He addressed the "real" issue with love, compassion, firmness, being direct without using anger or any other form of carnality. I believe that Christ saw others as a person first and remembered the reason why He was there (His calling). He did not get blindsided by the motives or lack of spiritual growth of that person, but confronted everyone with care.

Question: How can you confront people in a loving way that will gain positive results? Pastoral Care, Inc. would like to introduce a new word or concept to you... "**Care-Front**". The first part of this word is "**care**". When you finally get to the point, eliminating all the emotional and behavioral issues and focus only on the ministry of why you are called, then you can develop the right mindset to continue. When you care for our ministry, when you care about ourselves and family, when you care about our church... **then and only then can you address things in a different way**. Caring is the vital element for us solving issues and correcting dysfunctional behavior.

When I personally think of confronting or **carefronting**, I think of my daughter when she was a small child. I did not think twice about correcting her and helping create teaching moments for her. I did not think twice about telling her not to touch the stove because it was hot or tell her "don't play in the street" because I knew it was harmful or dangerous for her even if she did not realize it herself. She was immature.

You may be entrusted with spiritually immature people, not realizing that their behavior is so dysfunctional or harmful to them and others. When you **carefront** others, try to honestly see them as children needing help (in a respectful way), overlooking their behaviors, and focusing on the person. In other words, you can love the person and dislike the behavior when you care. That is what "**Carefront**" will do.

Another thing to consider is to keep in mind that differences or conflicts may be done by a "wounded sheep". Before trying to solve the issue, it may be wise to find hidden issues or hurt. A good shepherd always takes good care of his sheep.

NOTE: Your approach must be God-led, not man-led. Pastors have often approached the person or situation in the wrong way or spirit, being led by emotions such as anger, being bossy, argumentative, and without too much thought or prayer. This approach is man-led and usually has negative consequences.

A pastor must approach others or situations in a loving and respectful manner. One can confront others in love, being firm and yet gentle, understanding that everyone may have different thoughts or ideas about most anything in the church, whether they are spiritually mature or immature. You are the pastor, the one God has sent there to make a difference, not for popularity contests, comfort, or be called by people. We are simply called by God. If you believe that God has sent you to this church, then you should also believe that he is speaking to you about the direction of the church or how to approach others. These can be wonderful teaching moments.

Carefronting helps us to "stay on course" like a ship that is driven by the sea. Storms will often come, the winds will blow, but the ship and its captain must "stay on course" steering directly into the wind or storm to make any type of progress. Otherwise, the ship and its crew will

perish. Whether you are dealing with issues of staff betrayal, infidelity of a leader, a disagreement from a board member, or someone complaining about the direction of the church, it is imperative to show care. Knowing how to approach that person as a person first with love, respect, compassion, and gentleness will display Christ-like characteristics. When you care about your ministry, your calling, your people, and God's will for your life, your eyes will then be definitely focused back on the Kingdom. Remember your tenure as a pastor at that church may be only for a short time. What difference can you make during this time? Will people grow spiritually? Can they be God-led and have a teachable spirit? Can they improve their reputation within the community, and display Christ-like characteristics? They may need someone like you to provide a Godly example. The answer may lie with *Carefronting*.

Do's and Don't

Do:

- Approach any issue or problem with love and care.
- Examine your motives for any confrontation.
- Ask questions, listen, and be restful toward the person(s).
- Pray for direction and favor.
- Eliminate any personal emotions you may have towards a person or situation that would complicate your process.
- "Carefront" that individual(s), displaying a Christ-like behavior.
- Follow the example Christ used.
- Look for a positive solution. Be open minded but firm on the direction God is leading you.
- Try to create a win-win solution but do not compromise on what God is directing you to do. Remember, you ultimately have to answer to God for your actions and obedience, not to man.
- Allow this to be a teaching/learning moment for the individual or church.
- Remember the scripture that we do not wrestle with flesh and blood. Ephesians 6:12
- Be a Godly Leader!

Don'ts:

- Don't approach or go into a conflict situation empty-handed. Prepare with prayer, planning, and care.
- Avoid power struggles. This is not a test of strength or endurance.
- Do not state, "I am the pastor here and you have to listen or obey me".
- Do not show disrespect for the individual.
- Don't let your personal motives interfere with God's.

- Don't confront with a bombardment of scriptures. Treat questions fairly without emotions, treat people fairly with love, and use scriptures appropriately.
- Don't allow numbers to divert from coming up with a solution. If a number of people would like to meet with you, hear their concerns but do not be overwhelmed with their presence or control. People often try to bring others into their meeting to justify their actions or gain support to try to dominate the situation. Be aware of what is happening around you with love.
- Do not overwhelm people with too many numbers of people on your side when approaching one or two people. Remember you are not trying to intimidate others but work on solutions.
- Don't argue with others. Prevent power struggles.

Other Important Notes to Consider:

- One's approach initially is not so much about confronting or solving the issue as it is getting to know the person, what he/she is thinking, and seeing them as Christ does. The goal may be to emphasize the many ways you may be alike and to bring attention and understanding than correction.
- Effective ground rules should be set: 1. Everyone involved must be told that disagreements are okay. No one should ever feel guilty about offering a dissenting view. The key is how it may be presented and whether it warrants a confrontation. Haughty attitudes, dominant control behaviors, and an unwillingness to work towards a solution in unity are not allowed. 2. Each person should be allowed to state his/her position safely and with clarity. There is nothing unhealthy about airing feelings in a respectful setting. 3. Allow the other party to understand this is a safe place and time to share without any intention of hurting anyone. You are here to better understand them, discuss conflicting issues, and try to leave meeting with a win-win solution.
- One can consider every criticism must be accompanied by a compliment virtually in the same breath. People will be more willing to change if they are appreciated, understood, and valued.
- Present your view clearly and concisely. Try to remember the larger mission. Do not try to "win the battle and lose the war" so to speak.
- Most people are willing to bend if understood when shown dignity and respect. You can be firm but gentle, displaying love, care, dignity, and respect for them as a person, not necessarily their view.
- Use different approaches, such as, approaching a man, placing your arm around them, and asking, "Jim, I have heard some things like...Is there any truth to this?" Often they may confess and give you an opportunity to say, "How can I help you?" this approach may take them by surprise and win them over.

- If you are talking to someone who always complains to your general membership. You may approach them and ask them if they can promise to come to you first so you both can discuss this and explain how some people don't know how to handle complaints or criticism.
- Reframing the complaint or issue back to the person can be enlightening. When others hear what you are interpreting, they often see and hear the negative components which can lead them to cooperate towards a solution.
- Understand that different ideas do not mean they are personally against you. As a spiritual leader, you may know the direction the church must go. Your tone must be pleasant, your actions must be firm but gentle, and be willing to understand that there may be other ways to accomplish the same goal.
- Your church is looking and expecting a leader. Leaders lead by example as well as directing those around them for a common cause. Some of the best efforts of leadership skills come through communicating the goals and objectives of the church in a way for others to embrace them. “Individually, you can do little; but together you can accomplish anything!”

Other references: How to deal with disgruntled board member article and Directional Dialog.