FIGHT OR FLIGHT
A BETTER WAY

Week One
Learn to Listen - Do You Understand?

Being misunderstood can be one of the most frustrating things in life. All of us have walked away from a conversation thinking that everything was clear as a bell, only to be shocked as we discover someone else having a completely different interpretation of what was said. Wives misinterpret their husbands, husbands misjudge their wives, children think their parents don’t have a clue, and parents are exasperated by their children’s indifference to their wisdom. Watch the news and you’ll see fights break out on planes, trains and automobiles - like a school yard brawl. There has to be a better way! What in the world are we missing?

In a word—understanding! We are quick to judge and slow to listen. We take the information that flows around us and in microseconds, calculate an interpretation, and then react. And more often than not, we are somewhere south of a correct interpretation.

Misunderstandings can sometimes cause no more than a wrinkle in our day but impact us more than we know. When a misunderstanding occurs, the stakes can be high - marriages end, business deals are lost, friendships are destroyed and wars break out. When communication breaks down, so do the relationships that are affected.

Paul Tournier says it well:
“Listen to the conversations of our world, those between nations as well as those between couples. They are for the most past dialogues of the deaf. Exceedingly few exchanges of viewpoints manifest a real desire to understand the other person. No one can develop freely in this world and find a full life without feeling...”
understood by at least one person. Misunderstood, he loses his self-confidence, he loses his faith in life, or even in God. Here is even a greater mystery: no one comes to know himself through introspection, or in the solitude of his personal diary. He who would see himself clearly must open up to a confidant freely chosen and worthy of such trust. It may be a friend just as easily as a doctor; it may also be one’s marital partner."

The Bible tells us that we are all infected with something that is referred to as “the sin nature”. This “nature” is as natural to us as breathing. We take in the world around us--experiences, observations, perceptions, desires, and conversations--and sift them through a vantage point that is wired up to be myopic. By that, I mean, it is all about us. Do we feel and perceive ourselves to be safe, wanted, desired, important, special, or in contrast, unsafe, rejected, undesirable, unimportant, and insignificant? We are all, usually unconsciously, looking for some way to validate our own existence and purpose. This is a basic human need, that, when misunderstood, causes great vulnerability, insecurity, and the temptation to manipulate circumstances to find a semblance of what is alluding us. We all have a basic need to be known and to know, to be loved and to love, to be understood and cared for by someone.

When communication is healthy and effective, it can achieve and meet this basic human need. When it is unhealthy and ineffective, it exacerbates the sin conundrum. Instead of being a more loving people we are stricken with greater levels of selfishness.

Proverbs says it so well, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” We will remain lost, defensive and resistant to trust until we are (or allow ourselves to be) intercepted by the love of God. When his love is rejected or ignored, it leaves us separated from understanding and embracing the most powerful message and relationship that we have access to in Christ.

There are three goals that I hope we can accomplish today as we start our Fight or Flight series: 1) to understand God’s goal for us - why He has communicated to us; 2) to understand our goal each time we communicate; and 3) to understand the overarching goal of the series.

1) God’s goal for His communication. John 3:16 is as straightforward as any passage. It helps to clarify God communication to us? What did He want us to know and understand, by sending his own Son to deliver the message? John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
Communication is always intended to bring clarity, understanding and direction to relationships. When that communication breaks down or is rejected, or ineffectively delivered, the message becomes opaque, misunderstood and culminates in misdirection - we lose our way. Many of us are fighting against God’s call on our lives or pulling away entirely. Learning to open ourselves to God has the power to transform our ability to not only know God, but to also make Him known. Every day God wants you to experience an authentic spiritual connection that empowers you to know that you are loved and that He is completely for you. When we confidently understand this spiritual truth it does what Jesus described as “sets us free” (Jn 8:36). We become liberated and empowered to live and love more like Jesus.

2) Your goal in communication. All of us communicate for one primary reason. We want to be understood. When we learn to effectively use good communication tools this can be realized more often than not, which will in turn, strengthen and enrich our relationships.

What if you could learn how to see when your own behavior or habits are sabotaging your desire to be understood and could correct and change those habits so you could more effectively accomplish the goal of understanding with those around you.

3) My goal for this communication series is to give and inspire you to more fully embrace a few principles and tools that can significantly change the quality of your relationships when you need it the most - in times of disagreement or conflict.

We are not well-trained in communication and are therefore often frustrated by the challenge we face to be understood. It would be like trying to build a home with no experience, tools, or guidance. None of us would think for a moment that we would be successful, yet in our relationships we daily try to build relational connections with little or no guidance or tools. We will be examining a half dozen principles and tools, that if practiced, can and will significantly improve every relationship we have.