

Resolving Inner Conflict

I believe that one of the greatest causes of inaction is what is known as inner-conflict or internal conflict. There are 3 types of internal conflict that I will share with you in this message. These are the Me-Me Conflict, The Me-Flesh Conflict and the Me-Work Conflict. It is important to understand why you have these inner-conflicts and to get tools to resolve them. This is the kind of message that you might need to listen to a few times to get it into your spirit. When you do so the results are phenomenal.

James 1:6-8

⁶*But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

The word double-minded comes from the two Greek words, *dis* and *psuche* which means split in half or double souled. It is when you are of two minds. In essence and by definition this occurs when someone is split or vacillating in opinion or purpose. The Bible is clear about the power of agreement, yet we often forget about internal agreement, agreeing with yourself. It is important that everything we do stems from a heart full of peace (*Eirene*). This will only take place when we are at one with ourselves. The tragedy of the modern era is that our lives are riddled with different types of internal conflict that weigh us down and hinder us from getting important things done. This message will shift people from the divided self to the self that is at one with self and at one with God.

1. Me-Me Conflict

A Me-Me Conflict can occur when my will, my conscience or desires clash with my self-concept. This often stems from misbeliefs. For example,

“Pastors must always be nice therefore I can’t give church members negative feedback. I must always be the nice guy.” There are times when my conscience and my desire might be leading me to be truthful in giving feedback, but the image and self-concept I want to project is that I am a nice guy. The way this is resolved is by embracing the combo. I am a kind a loving person who is also truthful.

“I am a generous person therefore I can never say no to someone who asks for something.” This is resolved when you embrace the combo; “I am a generous person with healthy boundaries”. “I am a generous person who is primarily responsible for A, B and C and not D.”

“I am the head of my house and a strong leader therefore I can never show weakness.” This can be resolved by embracing the combo; “My strength is seen in my vulnerability. “His strength is perfected in weakness.”

The important thing to understand is that Me-Me Conflicts slow you down and cause you to delay getting things done. I have seen this in one organisation where a strong leader struggled to have a difficult conversation with a team member. He saw himself as someone who valued balance in life, yet he had to address the abuse of sick leave with her. I also saw a Me-Me Conflict taking place as a former colleague who saw herself as a generous person had to deal with a friend who seemed to be abusing her good nature. These inner-conflicts are resolved when we mature to a place of embracing ambiguity. It is important to break out of “either-or” thinking into “both-and” thinking, otherwise we remain ambivalent and inactive. It is so important for believers to understand that God is not one dimensional. We have been called to express different dimensions of God’s character.

John 1:17

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

We see in this scripture that Jesus embodied both grace and truth. We see in Ephesians that we are called to express truth but to do so in love. Many Christians live out one extreme over the other.

Eph 4:15

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

1 Cor 13:6

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Too often people are inactive and never get things done because they are trying to bypass telling the truth. They tell you that they did not want to hurt the other person. But love rejoices in truth. Truth expressed in the context of love is healthy. We have been called to express the truth in love. We need to embrace the kindness and severity of God.

Romans 11:22

Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

Romans 11:22 (NLT)

Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off.

There is another type of Me-Me Conflict that occurs when your current lifestyle is different to the image that you want to project. Do I spend a lot of time hiding my actions or beliefs from others? For example I know some people who went to Disney World on holiday but lied to their extended family that it was a business trip. What Me-Me Conflict do you think was going on there? What dissonance were they experiencing? How could they have resolved this? To resolve this Me-Me Conflict it is important to renounce your need to control other people's perception of you. It requires too much energy to keep everything a secret. As I have said before, "Your opinion of me will not control my destiny."

In Social psychology cognitive dissonance, a theory developed by Leon Festinger, refers to the mental conflict that occurs when a person's behaviours and beliefs do not align. It also occurs when a person holds two contradicting beliefs simultaneously. The result of this is that many people explain away things and rationalise their behaviour when valid information is presented before them. The outcome of cognitive dissonance is often an uneasy feeling. The degree of this dissonance is influenced by the type of belief, the value of the belief, and the size of the disparity. Some people find it easier resolving these disparities than others. The time it takes you to resolve these disparities will affect your action orientation and general productivity. A lot of people live in relationship ambivalence, where the relationship is too good to leave but too bad to stay. When you are in a state of dissonance you often feel guilty, anxious and ashamed. Ask yourself, what do I do when I am experiencing dissonance? How does it slow down my action orientation and productivity? What do I do when I can feel the gap between my espoused beliefs and my behaviour? There are a number of things people do to avoid dissonance: Do you shy away from discussions on certain topics? Do you avoid learning new information that goes against your existing beliefs? Do you avoid information or a doctor's advice that may cause dissonance? Do you avoid getting to know people that you have been prejudiced against in case their behaviour contradicts your negative beliefs about them? In other words, we often avoid the feeling of dissonance by attempting to squash the truth.

If someone promotes health and fitness but they don't practise these things, then they can experience a type of cognitive dissonance called hypocrisy. I experienced this as an executive coach before I was consistent in my physical exercise. The result is that you can feel fake and you can lack confidence in really accomplishing great things. This Me-Me Conflict can cause you to live with the fear of being found out. A lot of people are not prospering today because of a Me-Me Conflict that says, "Desiring wealth is greed so my prayers must just be small prayers to cover my needs." Such a person never prays audacious prayers despite a deep

desire to achieve greatness in business. When they remain with this inner-conflict they are double-minded and their prayers are powerless.

A Me-Me Conflict also occurs when someone projects an ideal image of themselves whilst the opposite is taking place inside. I saw this happen with a particular leader who told me that her biggest fear was that someone will say she hadn't delivered. The result was that she overcompensated in a number of ways. The nature of her fear was the fear of being found out. This results in an anxiety gap and the solution he is learning to level with people. So often we can resolve such cognitive dissonance by rejecting the lie and being comfortable with our weaknesses. So the first Me-Me Conflict I mentioned is often resolved by embracing the combo of qualities that are seemingly polar opposites. The second type is often resolved by rejecting the lies and aligning with the truth from God's Word about who we are. If God has prospered you, then you can give Him praise and embrace it unapologetically. Don't feel guilty about your success, unless your wealth is as a result of stealing from the people around you.

2. Me-flesh Conflict

Paul the Apostle experienced this Me-Flesh conflict and so do all of us. We see in this passage how he struggles to resolve this inner-conflict.

Rom 7:15 - 25

¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Mt 26:41 (AMP)

Keep actively watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

The Me-Flesh Conflict takes place when my spirit clashes with my flesh. We need to feed our spirit-man so that it is stronger than our flesh and soul. Resolving this inner-conflict is an active process.

Gal 6:8

Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

The more you sow into your flesh by giving attention and mindshare to things of the flesh then the more you will experience this inner-conflict with your flesh tending to dominate your spirit. Jesus recognised this principle at work in us. *Mt 26:41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

Not everything that slows you down or hinders you is sin. Sometimes there are things our flesh desires that are weights that stop us from getting things done. *Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...*

If we are to throw these things off, then we must first identify them. These things of the flesh end up ensnaring us. *Heb 12:1 (NKJV) Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great*

a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

What are the weights and sin that are hindering you from getting Kingdom things done in your life?

1 John 2:16

For everything in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--comes not from the Father but from the world.

It is important for us to be radical about these things. Christians who try to entertain both the world and the things of God delay getting Kingdom things being done in their lives. A common Me-Flesh Conflict is where we do things partially for God's glory and partially for our own significance and glory. Many believers desire honour from God whilst aggressively pursuing validation from man.

Jesus helped people with Me-Flesh Conflicts. *Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*

Mark 10:17-23

¹⁷*As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* ¹⁸*"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.* ¹⁹*You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honour your father and mother.'*" ²⁰*"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."* ²¹*Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."* ²²*At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.* ²³*Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"*

Could it be, that you are very religious but there is an area of your life where your flesh still dominates? Who else would have picked up on this? I wonder how this man was perceived by others. Could it be that others praised him, including his parents, but heaven was not applauding. It was this particular Me-Flesh conflict in his life that was stopping him from getting true Kingdom things done. Jesus said, "then follow me." Being religious does not mean you are really following Jesus. Could it be that today God could be saying to you He is pleased with your prayers and concern for people but there is one thing you need to give up because that could be your downfall?

Let me give you some common examples of Me-Flesh Conflict. They often manifest when there is a desire to obey God's Word but your flesh (which includes all soulish behaviour like the need to be needed etc) wants something else. For example, you know that the Bible says that it is important to discipline your kids and this is actually a sign of love for them, but you struggling with seeing them sad, hurt or isolated. You also don't want to be the unpopular parent playing bad cop all the time. That's a Me-Flesh Conflict that causes you to remain in limbo and not get good things done. Perhaps you know that you should not be unequally yoked to an unsaved boyfriend but in principle you are quite an inclusive person and do not want him to feel rejected, especially because he is actually quite a nice guy. The result is that you remain in relationship ambivalence and don't do what is right. Maybe you know it is important for Christians to speak up and not be ashamed of Jesus' teachings but you remain silent by rationalizing that you don't want to be perceived as self-righteous and judgemental. The truth is that you actually have a deep fear of being banished from the in-group but you suppress this by explaining away your behaviour. Do you know how to resolve such inner-conflict because therein lies your breakthrough?

The Me-Flesh conflict is in effect also a Me-God Conflict. So there is conflict between your flesh and your spirit and there is also often conflict between your will and God's will.

Ask yourself the questions;

- Am I wrestling with God's authority in any area of my life?
- Can I unequivocally answer the question, "Who is in charge of my life?"
- Am I willing to surrender to His purpose and plan for my life?
- Am I positioning myself to pass the tests in my life?
- Have I completely yielded to God's Word and His ways?

Pray the prayer of relinquishment. Relinquishment means to release or let go. There are powerful songs we sing in times of worship that are really songs of consecration and relinquishment. For example, "I surrender all." Or "Withholding Nothing" by William McDowall.

"No one is ever united with Jesus Christ until he is willing to relinquish not sin only, but his whole way of looking at things..." - Oswald Chambers

In the book titled Prayer - Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard Foster, he writes that "we begin to enter into a grace-filled releasing of our will and a flowing into the will of the Father. It is the prayer of relinquishment that moves us from the struggling to the releasing... this prayer is a bona fide letting go, but it is a release with hope... God is not destroying the will but transforming it so that...we can freely will what God wills."

1 Cor 6:19-20

¹⁹*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;* ²⁰*you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.*

Breakthrough in this area takes place when we accept that we do not belong to ourselves.

3. Me-Work Conflict

The Me-Work Conflict can occur when there is no balance in your life. Sometimes this is an indication that it is time to move on. At times it happens when the grace to be in an environment has lifted. I experienced this when I shifted from a consultancy firm to working for a church.

The Me-Work conflict also occurs when the values and expectations at work clash with my personal principles and beliefs. Your primary loyalty is to God and His principles. For example, I remember someone I was coaching wanting to work for a development bank as opposed to remaining working in the treasury department of a bank. She was struggling with how banks make money out of their customers and this was producing an inner-conflict within her. I am sure she enjoyed the money she was being paid by the bank, yet at the same time she probably felt a bit of guilt and shame. This affects one's productivity and ability to get things done even subconsciously. It is important to note that some of these things are quite personal and others in her environment did not experience the same dissonance. There have been times when I have had to prayerfully consider doing work for organisations that sell and distribute products that I don't fully endorse. At times I have been comforted by the fact that I am helping to grow people but I have noticed within me a reticence to push for more work with these organisations. These are all examples of Me-Work Conflict. Some people are good identifying these whilst others remain for years experiencing these inner-conflicts. I remember coaching a lady in a telecom multinational who came to the realisation that she didn't like aspects of her job that others liked and she appreciated some of the work that they were doing. She made a decision to have a difficult conversation with them with regards to swapping aspects of their roles.

Sometimes Me-Work conflicts occur when you are given instructions by your boss that go against what is best for the company. Sometimes this inner-conflict can be resolved when you realise that your role is not to make decisions for your boss but to warn them about the consequences of their decisions. I remember speaking into a situation where someone disagreed with how her company was charging clients and sighted what she perceived to be

inconsistencies. I explained to her that this was normal practice in other organisations for various reasons and that her role was to advise her leaders but she was not accountable. This seemed to help her with that Me-Work conflict. It can be a bit more challenging when the inner-conflict occurs as a result of a clash between the instruction from your boss and your personal beliefs.

Daniel 6:7

The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den.

Essentially Daniel was thrown into the lion's den because he ignored this edict. Today there are many subtle aspects of organisational culture that embrace some people and exclude those that do not conform. The challenge for us is are we going to be a Daniel or are we going to compromise? If you do not pre-decide what you will do in such cases, you will be riddled with inner-conflict. You can see that for Daniel it was a non-issue. I believe that Daniel continued praying largely because it was a habit.

Daniel 6:10

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Daniel's experience reminds me of what I went through in my last year of school in 1993. I was focused on the Christian group I led on Thursday nights whilst a prefects' booze up was taking place welcoming the new prefects. The result was that all the old and new prefects were suspended from leadership for some time except for me. There was no inner-conflict for me because I was otherwise preoccupied as I had always been, so I wasn't even involved or told about it. I often say to people: If staying in your current environment is causing you to sin, then perhaps it is time to move on. Remember, from scripture we learn that wisdom is judged by her fruit. Someone once advised us saying, "Never stay in a business that you can't walk away from." If you can't walk away from it then it means the business has you.

There is a Me-Work Conflict around the work of evangelism. Some people have embraced a theology that expresses that God doesn't really want some people to get saved so it is okay if we don't reach out to them. This might even be a way of people resolving the inner-conflict they experience when people reject the wonderful Gospel. I like what the Bible teaches. *2 Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

Jesus has resolved this inner-conflict for us by making it clear that the Father's heart is willing to save, the challenge is the labourers. *Matthew 9:37-38* ³⁷*Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. ³⁸"Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."*

Part of the reason why there is a lot of inactivity when it comes to evangelism and outreach is because of an inner-conflict many of us have. "God is good, but people don't seem to want Him." Jesus resolves this for us.