



Discovering Buried Treasure in Conflict

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Some years ago, I was leading a series of men's group discussions focusing on conflict resolution. At the first session, I asked the assembled men to answer this question: "What is the first thing that pops into your mind when you hear the word 'conflict'?" For the next 60 seconds I heard a barrage of words such as hurt, pain, disagreement, abandonment, separation, divorce, disaster and a host of other similar words. They were all negative words.

Then, in order to make sure that every guy had been allowed to speak, I asked if there were any other comments. A man on the back row simply said: "buried treasure."

From that moment forward, the discussion took a sharp right turn—a good turn. We spent the next 30 minutes in a marvelous discussion about the concept of finding buried treasure in conflict.

Here was the bottom line of our discussion: If we can change our attitude toward what we perceive as negative events in our life, there is buried treasure to be discovered in working out those challenges. We must learn how to perceive conflict as an opportunity to both find and deliver "treasure" to the other person or persons involved in the conflict.

Let me give you a very simple example: I have often worked with couples in counseling who have a major issue involving the way one spouse treats his or her step-children—typically by showing favoritism to a biological child, thereby disadvantaging step-children and, sometimes, the children from the second marriage. Often, when this type of pattern is fully explored and exposed, we find that the misbehaving spouse (the one allegedly showing unfairness) is simply trying to deal with guilt from the divorce. He is trying to make up for lost time with his child from the first marriage. The real issue is the man's guilt—not the fact that the child constantly causes tension between the couple.

The treasure is this: God wants to deal with the father's guilt from his first marriage. He wants the Dad and his new wife to discover the buried treasure of how God's love and forgiveness can set the man free from the guilt of handling his first marriage poorly. Once that happens, the Dad will be able to handle his son and the other children without the sub-surface driver of guilt.

What does Scripture have to say about this? Here is one of my favorite verses in the Bible, which proves that God created us to be searchers for buried treasure:

- **Proverbs 25:1 and 2:** *"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings."*

I believe it is the very nature of God to conceal from us some of the most precious things of life. For example, he tells us that if we need more wisdom and understanding we must search for it as we would for buried treasure:

- **Proverbs 2:1-6:** *"My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."*

We can also take a lesson from Creation. Many of the riches of the world were concealed from us until we started "mining" for them: Oil and gas, diamonds, pearls, silver and gold, bone marrow, Carlsbad Caverns, coral reefs, wood grains, geodes, unpolished rocks, the human heart and brain, human life conception, and the Holy Spirit. The same is true in human relationships. We must dig for the buried treasure that is often lost in the heat of conflict.

One of the buried treasures of conflict can be found in the stream of words that often characterize an argument between a married couple. If a marriage partner can learn to listen carefully to the barrage of angry and hurtful words coming from their partner's mouth without reacting overtly, they will find there are some treasures to be found in the "garbage heap" of attacking words. For example, I remember a time when I had deeply hurt my wife by being bone-headed and selfish. When she asked me for 60 seconds of help, I gave her a lecture on time management. Her reaction was predictable. She was very angry. We could not get past that incident.

We had skirmish after skirmish over seemingly minor matters. It seemed to never end. "Can't we just forget it?" I would ask. Then, finally when we got intentional about it, I found that I had deeply hurt her. When I heard that simple word, "hurt," the light bulb came on. I then found a long-standing pattern of hurt that I had inflicted on my sweet wife that needed to be forgiven and healed. Finding that hurt and dealing with it was one of the greatest "buried treasures" of our 45-year marriage.

In early Colorado history, hundreds of brave souls came here to dig through the mountains near Central City and elsewhere. They were in search of buried treasure. Did they find it lying on the ground? Not very often. Normally, they had to mine a mountainside of virtually worthless dirt in order to find a few grains of gold or silver. They had to mine through the muck and mire to get to the treasure.

Do you see it? Here is God's promise about treasures in family life:

- **Proverbs 24:3-4:** *"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures."*