

## MANAGING CONFLICT

A powerful, almost incomprehensible Christmas story comes from the beginning of the Great War (World War I). In his book, *Silent Night: The Story of the World War Christmas Truce*, Stanley Weintraub describes the unofficial truce that extended across “No Man’s Land,” a place in Central France where hundreds of thousands of soldiers had been killed and wounded.

For twenty-four hours, the enemies shared food and drink, buried their dead and even exchanged gifts. Carl Muhlegg, a German private, secured a small tree and decorated it with candles to take to his French foes. Although sporadic gunfire could be heard from an adjoining sector, he traveled about a kilometer to deliver his gift. He wrote, “After all, I was Father Christmas bearing a decorated tree, although.... with a gun over my shoulder and a bag of ammunition. I handed the captain the little Christmas tree. He lit the candles and wished his shoulders, the German nation and the whole world, “Peace according to the message of the angel.”

Peace in the midst of the storm or a truce in the midst of war. Often, this is only possible when people take a moment to consider the bigger picture and have the courage to take action—sometimes in unexpected ways.

### *To Think About...*

As wars are being waged in every corner of the globe, we need to pause during this season and give thanks for those who are serving their countries or living in harm’s way. There are many fathers, granddads and father figures who are separated from their children and are giving their lives to protect others, as well as dads whose children are serving in the military.

Yet beyond the physical conflicts around the world, there is a larger group of fathers who are facing conflicts in their hearts. This season is particularly difficult for families who have gone through the trauma of divorce, or who may be contending with a life-threatening illness or helping a struggling child. These families also need outside support, a vision for the bigger picture, and the courage to respond to their challenges.

As we learn to negotiate challenges in life, having a strategy to resolve conflicts is vital to our fathering skills. Here are four suggestions for managing conflict in healthy ways: 1) Plan to be calm. Establish a routine that will help you and your family members remain in control. Allow “time outs” for getting away and calming down. 2) Speak and Listen Non-defensively. Pay close attention to what you’re communicating—both verbally and non-verbally. Try to avoid blaming, sarcasm, rolling your eyes, sounding contemptuous, or jumping to wrong conclusions. 3) Validate Your Family Members. Let them know you understand their feelings by taking responsibility for your actions and giving a sincere apology. 4) Don’t Argue

**About What You Said in the Past. Admit that you might not remember things as they really happened, and that your family member might be correct. Then move on to the current matter.**

**Your modeling of these skills will be an invaluable asset to your children as they grow up, relate to people, and someday have families of their own.**

*Action Points for Committed Fathers...*

- 1. Express your appreciation for someone you know who is serving our country. Send a note, a gift, or find another way to support him or his family.**
- 2. Talk with your children about times that you successfully dealt with conflict, and the times you fell short. Help them think through healthy responses to a variety of conflict situations.**
- 3. Institute a new family tradition over the holidays, like: caroling to your neighbors, shoveling snow or delivering food to a needy family.**

**In all things, listen, listen and love, love.**