



## LUMP OF KOHL

Remember the *Andy Griffith Show*? There is an episode in which a new choir director assigns Barney a solo part in the upcoming concert based on Barney's claim that he could sing. But everybody in Mayberry knows that Barney can't sing. Choir practice was dreadful when it came to Barney singing his part. For fear of hurting his feelings, Andy and the choir director couldn't muster the courage to tell Barney how badly he sounded. With a scheduled concert right around the corner, they devised a scheme. Andy told Barney to sing into a "newfangled microphone" that only required Barney to whisper. Meanwhile, a gifted baritone in the choir would slip backstage, sings melodiously into a live mic, and drown out Barney's whisper. Barney thinks it is his voice coming through the speakers and he is quite pleased with himself and the new microphone. The only person in the whole house that didn't realize what is going on was Barney.

The scene is hilarious in a sitcom. But what if that was real life? What if the truth leaked out to Barney? How would he feel toward Andy as a friend? What would he think of the new choir director? What would he think of the people of Mayberry? In different ways, this scene plays out every day in homes, workplaces, schools, and churches. It's called conflict avoidance.

The reasons for avoiding conflict are usually rooted in fear of some kind - fear of a negative reaction, fear of hurting someone's feelings, fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of rejection, fear of appearing selfish, and so forth. We, therefore, prefer to let sleeping dogs lie. But even sleeping dogs eventually wake up. If we wait until we have no fear, we will never confront the issue until it sneaks up behind us, pounces on us, drives us to the ground, and forces us to deal with it. Experience shows that as difficult as it is to deal with an issue upfront, it is much more difficult to deal with it later when it becomes a crisis. I know from personal experience and experience in the churches I've served. The pain of dealing with things upfront is less than the pain of having to deal with them in a time of crisis. Accepting our fears as natural, we are best off confronting issues as they arise or ahead of time if possible.

Proverbs 27:6 says, *Faithful are the wounds of a friend*. Ephesians 4:15 says we should speak *the truth in love* to one another. Ephesians 4:29 gives us instruction about what we say: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*. And Colossians 4:6 gives us instruction on how we should say what we say: *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone*.

The good news is that we can learn to confront issues lovingly just as we can learn to do anything with practice and time. Besides the Bible, the book that helped me the most in dealing with conflict avoidance in my life is *The Coward's Guide to Conflict* by Tim Ursiny.

We have no control over how people react to what we say, even when said in the most tactful and loving way. But removing the elephant out of the room ultimately makes room for an improved quality of life in any marriage, friendship, and church.