



Case Study One:
Mutual Fault and Contribution to the Conflict
Moderate Life Consequence Conflict

- Women's Discipleship Coordinator: **Evelyn**
- Key Volunteer: **Maria**

Evelyn was the women's discipleship coordinator when Maria first came to church as a college freshman. That was 14 years ago. Evelyn had been in her role for 3 years then. Maria was serious about her faith even as a college student. Maria wanted a mentor, not just college aged friends, that resulted in Evelyn and Miriam developing a close bond. For 10+ years Evelyn and Maria were a textbook example of intergenerational discipleship going really well.

In recent years, Maria has begun to feel like women's ministry was becoming stale. Most of the ministry events were pre-set before the year began; only the theme changed. Maria felt like this accounted for why fewer younger women were participating and why there was a growing divide between *insiders* (those who were familiar with what was going on and had a voice) and *outsiders* (those who didn't understand why things were done that way and weren't heard). Maria felt like an insider with a burden for outsiders. Evelyn was offended that Maria said this distinction existed. Evelyn took it as an accusation that she wasn't being friendly and hospitable.

To prove her concerns were valid Maria surveyed a few of the younger women who had come to a few events in the past year but didn't "stick." They enthusiastically affirmed Maria's observations and begged her to try to advocate for changes in how the women's discipleship ministry was structured. Evelyn interpreted this an act of insubordination and an attempt to cause division.

Evelyn felt betrayed and undermined. Conversations began to become more personal and struggled to stay focused on new ministry possibilities. Evelyn kept trying to understand why Maria would create division. Maria said that wasn't what she was trying to do. Evelyn said Maria was being unteachable and that further validated, in Evelyn's mind, that Maria was in the wrong. Maria took the accusation that she was being unteachable as evidence that Evelyn was stuck in her ways.

Eventually, Evelyn brought her concerns to the pastor. Evelyn shared the basic facts of what happened (i.e., Maria talking with younger women about changes they wanted to see in the women's ministry), but within a betrayal and divisive narrative (i.e., Maria was grumbling and was trying to rally support for her ideas).

When the pastor followed up with Maria to get her side of the story, it was clear that Evelyn had shared what happened in a way that portrayed Maria as subversive. Maria was deeply hurt and angry. After this meeting, when it felt like pastor was taking Evelyn's side, Maria began to wonder if she should change churches.

Both Evelyn and Maria strongly asserted that they were both being the same person they had always been. Evelyn - structured, well-planned, working within systems, and passionate about women's

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discipleship. Maria - proactive, problem-solver, critical thinker with a tendency to be dissatisfied with the status quo, and passionate about women's discipleship.

Both would point to the last 14 years as evidence that the way the other was portraying them couldn't be true. The more they made their points, the less it mattered that they agreed on most of the facts about what prompted their disagreements. The narrative surrounding those events kept becoming further and further apart, and more polarized.

Both Evelyn and Maria valued their friendship and the church enough that they began to reach out for counsel, but if they were honest, both were so hurt that neither of them felt much hope that things would improve.



Case Study Two:
Lop-Sided Responsibility
Higher Level Life Consequences to Conflict

- Dad: **Desmond**
- Step-Mom (married 4 years): **Kimberly**
- Daughter (21 years old): **Stephania**
- Son (17 years old): **DJ**

Desmond's first wife died in a car accident when Stephania was 10 and DJ (Desmond Jr.) was 6. As a family of three, they weathered their grief and the teenage years and managed to maintain a tight family bond. Desmond didn't meet Kimberly for another 5 years, they took it slow dating for 2 years, and got married when Stephania and DJ were 17 (Junior) and 13 (8th grade). That was 4 years ago.

All things considered, the first couple of years as a blended family went remarkably well. There was the normal drama associated with the middle school and high school years. But none of it got intense and their family relationships never felt brittle. That began to change last year.

As DJ looked forward to his Senior year of high school, he felt an urge to "be his own man." His sister had always been a model student and leader in church ministries. The whole family was pretty straight-laced. What DJ has long appreciated as stable, he began to view as boring and constrictive.

DJ began to seek out friends who took more risks. He began hanging out with his new friends without informing his parents of who he was with, where he was going or what they would be doing. DJ's grades were still passing but fell significantly, and Desmond got the sense DJ was experimenting with marijuana even though he couldn't prove it yet.

When Desmond explained that knowing where DJ was and who he was with was an expectation of the home, DJ blew up and called his dad controlling. Kimberly commented that DJ shouldn't be rude to his father. DJ told her to, "Shut up and mind your own business," because, "You're not my mom and have no right to tell me what to do." Desmond reprimanded DJ and spouted something about his dad choosing Kimberly over him. But in 4 years as a blended family, this kind of accusation had never been an issue before.

DJ continued to push for freedom. He began to be disrespectful towards teachers and got angry every time Desmond tried to initiate a conversation about one of the big "Senior year decisions" (i.e., college, major, career, etc.) in front of him. Each time DJ would say his dad was using these conversations to pressure him into becoming the person his dad wanted him to be.

Conflicts began to emerge between Desmond and Kimberly. Kimberly became self-conscious about whether she was creating a wedge in the family. She began second guessing many of her actions and words. Desmond was perplexed and exhausted with DJ, so he was more easily annoyed by the growing insecurity in Kimberly. This only exacerbated her insecurities.



When Stephania came home for a week from college at Thanksgiving she barely recognized the home she returned to. DJ was gone for 3 days and no one knew where. The couple of times Desmond got DJ to answer his phone, the conversation quickly degenerated into defiance and yelling. Kimberly was clearly making decisions purely to “not rock the boat.”

When Stephania told her dad, “You would never have let me get away with any of this,” Desmond just looked back at her with an expression of defeat. She thought her dad looked more weak and tired at that moment than in the early stages of learning to be a single dad.

After Thanksgiving break, as Desmond and Kimberly talked about all that transpired, they decided they would pursue family counseling. They weren’t sure if or how often DJ would participate, but they were no longer willing to surrender to the status quo.