

Dealing With Friendly Fire

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With current events being peppered with multiple simultaneous military conflicts, the term “friendly fire” is becoming commonplace in our cultural dictionary. “Friendly fire” is seen when munitions are accidentally deployed upon ones own military; many times leading to unnecessary deaths. Unfortunately, leaving victims and family confused as to who are the “good guys”.

“Friendly fire” is not unique to military conflict; it is ubiquitous within all organizations. One need not travel far to hear of someone’s story of seeming betrayal from a leader or peer group that led to confusion, then to frustration, and resulting in bitterness. It could be hypothesized that the cause of Christ has lost as many leaders to “friendly fire” as from enemy attacks.

Paul addressed “friendly fire” in II Timothy 4:14-16. Paul tells Timothy of Alexander who did great harm to their gospel and warned Timothy to stay away from him. He also tells of an unnamed group that deserted him at his court hearing. Paul’s writing is more than complaining to Timothy about betrayal. He is modeling to his pupil how to deal with “friendly fire”. Paul’s advice to Timothy can be disseminated into five practical points that can be implemented in our lives to protect our hearts.

Keep the mission the mission

Paul’s concern about Alexander was not personal, but that he thwarted the message of the Gospel. Paul did not allow himself to take the conflict personal. Many times leaders get offended when they are personally hurt or offended, which is human. But this habit will lead us to selfishness and bitterness. When we face an opportunity for bitterness as leaders, our first weapon is to keep the Great Commission our mission.

Find significance in God

How do we keep our mission aligned? Paul gets his strength not from the approval of others but from his God. If we are leading only for the approval of others

then we will be frustrated with the inconsistencies of humanity. But if our significance is found in Jesus Christ, situations need not define us. Remember that if we are following God, nothing external can harm our future, for it is in God’s hands alone.

Seek to understand

The next step is to gain understanding from the situation. Paul differentiated the motives of Alexander and the unnamed party in verse 16. He warned Timothy to stay away from Alexander and prayed the unnamed party would not be held accountable for their actions. Understanding the motives of the opposing party helps determine a purposeful response to opposition.

Take a self evaluation

Possibly the most critical step to take is a self evaluation. We must remember that some outside persecution is self initiated. Many times we experience “friendly fire” because of our own immaturity, selfishness, or inexperience. It is in these situations that we should humble ourselves and seek to identify what we can change within ourselves. A good tool in this case is a journal. A journal will serve as a venue to put practical steps to immediately implement and will show personal growth when read later.

Forgive

Finally, regardless of the motives of outside attacks, we still have a choice not to become bitter. Paul understood that the mission of the church was less about individual rights, and more about knowing God. The most powerful response to emotional hurt is to forgive others as often as necessary.

None of these steps will lessen the pain of “friendly fire”; they serve as tools to keep our perspective on the mission of God. So when we go through a valley, we must pray, “Jesus, take me one more time to Golgotha to be reminded that all that we are going through was conquered by the work of the cross.” ★

— Nathaniel Binion
Hyphen Director