Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Proverbs 27:6).

We are born helpless. As soon as we are fully conscious, we discover loneliness. Because God created us to need each other, it is in relationships that much of who we are is realized and fashioned. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly emphasizes the value and benefits of healthy relationships. However, to my way of thinking, life would be so much easier at times if no one needed us and we needed no one because, honestly, relationships are hard work, especially relationships with sandpaper people.

Difficult relationships and people who rub us the wrong way are often assigned permanent seats in our world and don’t always come with the option of escape. So we must make a choice. We can either learn to get along with people who rub us the wrong way or retreat into a substitute for the relationship God intended. Work fills the hours that should be spent learning to live together in peace. Children fill the void that a difficult spouse refuses to fill. Needs are unmet and desires are numbed in an effort to live peacefully with that sandpaper person.

Marriages are filled with conflict and turmoil because one or both marriage partners are sandpaper people.

Friendships splinter and workplace relationships disintegrate under the constant emotional fire of sandpaper people.

It is almost humorous – almost – that sandpaper people rarely see or accept the fact that they are the coarser of the two in any relationship. The abrasive people in life are masters at dodging blame and skirting responsibility for the emotional upheaval that follows them like their own shadow. One of the treasures found in a healthy relationship is the learned ability to give and take. Friendships are meant to teach us how to love and trust people on many different levels. The workplace is a laboratory for personality experiments and conflict management.

A thread of flexibility runs through the center of every healthy relationship, accepting those who grate on our nerves, accommodating their quirks and flaws. The problem is that sandpaper people avoid flexibility if at all possible, afraid that any change will exclude them, which is the very thing they fear most and the one thing their abrasive behavior always produces. The question then becomes, what part must we play in dealing with these difficult people. How can we come to the table of relationship health and walk away with a solution?
One of the basic needs of every healthy relationship is the art of confrontation. To confront someone is to meet them head-on in the quest for compromise. Confrontation is an emotional tackle for the purpose of resolving conflict while promoting peace. Just as God separates us from our sin, He calls us to do the same with sandpaper people. We must disconnect who they are from what they do, loving the sinner but hating the sin, looking beyond their weaknesses in search of their strengths.

Most people I know hate confrontation and will do anything to avoid it, but in doing so, give the impression that they are content with the status quo. It is important for us to understand that silence is agreement. Confrontation is a gift we bring to every healthy relationship as well as the unhealthy relationships with which we struggle. Confrontation is a spiritual surgery that tends to be painful. But without it, the cancer of contention and discord will remain unfettered, free to grow and spread its deadly relationship poison.