

The Messenger

A Ministry of Nahunta Friends Church

Taking Off the Headphones July 2026

Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible
Romans 12:18 (NLT)

Interesting things can happen on a five-hour plane trip. Such was the case for me years ago on a flight from Portland. There was a young fella who looked to be in his twenties in the window seat on my row. Soon a woman in her late fifties joined us and began to nestle into the middle seat. I try to suppress first impressions, but sometimes they are overwhelming. The young man seemed forceful and overconfident, and the woman seemed a bit self-focused and indifferent, but we all settled down, and the plane took off.

At one point in the flight, I heard the guy chewing something. It sounded like gum or a piece of tire tread. Whatever it was, he was working it over. Obviously the woman heard it well, and it was getting to her. A little later in the flight, having all she could stand, the woman looked at the guy and said, *Your chewing is so loud and obnoxious. You sound like an animal.* At first he seemed shocked, then he bowed up. He took his gum out of his mouth and show it to her. He asked if she would be more offended if he twirled it on his finger. Well! At that point, the fight was on. For several minutes they threw barbs at one another, until it got ugly. The woman finally said, *Your mother did a rotten job of raising you!* to which the guy replied, *I have these headphones here that drown out sound. I can see your lips moving but I can't hear your voice. I bet your husband would love a pair of these!*

I contemplated what I should do. I could offer to sit between them, but did not feel led to die a martyr for Jesus from such an insignificant event. I also thought about reading the Bible....out loud. Maybe a passage from Leviticus about stoning would be good. Eventually the young man put on his headphones and tuned out, then the lady asked the stewardess for some headphones so that she could tune him out. For the next two hours they sat in silence, walled off from each other and the conflict between them. Waiting to land and get away from it all....while I was quietly thanking God that I had an aisle seat.

This is symbolic of how relational conflict can be handled, or *not* be handled. We all face conflict in our lives. It may be with a coworker or neighbor, or in the home with a spouse, parent, or child. One of the easiest responses to conflict is to shut out the other person and the problem.

In most conflicts, we have three options. The first option is to **"tune it up"**, which happens when we get loud, or angry, or forceful. I have done that, and always lived to regret it. Can you relate? The second option is to **"tune out"**, which is when we cut the person off through avoidance or the silent treatment. When we do this we are curling up in the cocoon of self-protection while still spewing out voiceless venom. Silence may be needed in a heated moment, but this silence is not productive because it is rooted in revenge. There is a third option. We can **"tune in"**. We can tune in on several levels in the midst of a disagreement. One area we can tune into is our own emotions. We can ask, *Why am I so mad?* Is it because I have been mistreated or do I just want to get



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my way?" Such honest self-assessment is priceless during conflict, and often just as rare. The second area I can tune into is the other person. I must ask, *Have I really heard this person? Is there truth in their comments, even if it is buried under a lot of emotion and immaturity?* Finally, and most importantly, we can tune into the Holy Spirit. The Lord will help us understand the conflict from His perspective and give us the grace to act and react with a Christ-like spirit.

So, our lesson for better relationships is not to go through life with headphones on. When conflicts happen we should try to tune in to the other person before seeing them as an adversary. Pay attention to your deeper motives, listen to the other person's perspective, and draw on the Holy Spirit's wisdom.

Oh, there is one more lesson for better relationships....don't chew so loud.

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