Assignment Title: Conflict Case Study

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I'm currently partnering with Envision Bangkok which primarily involves discipleship and evangelism among university students and young professionals, and hosting short-term missions teams and interns. Our team is comprised of one American missionary couple as site directors, two local Thai women, and my husband and me. Our approach to ministry is largely relational and community-oriented, which entails regularly meeting with pre-believers and new Christians, getting to know them on a deeper level, and pointing them to Jesus no matter where they are in their walk with him. As rewarding as building meaningful relationships may be, it can also be tiring and time-consuming; thus, unless personal boundaries and healthy rhythms are set, the joy of serving can ever-so-slightly lead to burnout.

One of the Thai staff, who we'll call O, was showcasing signs of physical and spiritual burnout for months – irritability, fatigue, and back-to-back sicknesses – and finally crashed and burned a few weeks ago. During one of our weekly meetings, a discussion about vacation days quickly escalated into an argument between O and the team leads. O had booked a month-long trip to Europe expecting paid leave, but was deeply disappointed when she discovered she wouldn't be paid since she would not be on-ground doing ministry. O was hurt by the decision as she felt she deserved the paid time off and was entitled to it. In her own words, "I worked for 3 years straight without a break!" It is true that O dedicates a lot of time and energy to serving and pouring into others, often filling her schedule to the brim and putting her own needs last. It is also true that she does not rest, despite the team's insistence that she regularly take a true sabbath. Our Envision site directors give us the freedom to plan out our weeks, so long as we abide by our roles and responsibilities and connect with different people as the Spirit leads. This includes intentionally carving out time to take holy rest, "for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his" (Hebrews 4:10). Beyond the lack of self-care

and unmet expectations, O also misplaced her identity and value in her work. The most telling statement that revealed her truest hurt was when she said, "You don't love me." That's when we all collectively and vehemently reaffirmed that we do love her! The lie that had taken root in her soul was a performance lie, convincing her that because the site directors denied her paid leave even after she sacrificed so much for ministry, she must not be loved.

As I reflect on this recent conflict, I completely agree with Rick Warren when he said we don't argue over ideas, but emotions. On the surface, the discussion was about paid leave, but at the heart of the issue, O felt slighted and unloved. The way we resolved the argument that day actually aligned well with Rick's steps on conflict resolution. After listening to her unload her frustrations and tearfully share her perspective, we spent the better half of the meeting on steps 5-7, which included speaking truth tactfully, fixing the problem, and focusing on reconciliation. We reiterated the importance of practicing sabbath rest and spending time in God's presence so that we can serve from a place of fullness instead of emptiness. I had also just finished reading Rob Reimer's *Spiritual Authority*, and encouraged her that not every problem is her assignment and that it's important to discern what God desires her to do, so that she can freely say no. Knowing we were speaking truth in love, O even outrightly asked for candid feedback on how she can more wisely steward her time and energy for the Lord in the future. Eventually, the team leads resolved to grant her pay if she was able to complete some key assignments remotely. Ultimately, O was able to restore her fraught relationship with the team leads, but perhaps more importantly, she realized she had been standing on a faulty foundation of performance. If left unresolved, with both parties avoiding confrontation, deeper resentment and bitterness likely would've festered in the long run. Praise God that the conflict, however uncomfortable, has led to O unearthing wounds in heart, sparking the start of a journey towards true healing in her life.