

SESSION 7

The Fundamental Guide for Conflict Resolution

We must have godly communication in order to resolve conflict and have relational intimacy in the home. Disunity in the home can stem from personal difference, preference, offense, or physical/verbal conflict. Relational conflict is not condoned by God. However, relational conflict is purposed by God to produce humility, selflessness, submission, unity, love, and ultimately Christ-likeness. It is foundational for the believer to become an expert in conflict resolution.

James 3:1-12 proves that our words are powerful and dangerous

1. Our Tongues can DOOM us – Do not add or take away (teachers have stricter judgment) 3:1-2
2. Our Tongues can DIRECT us – Bits & Ships (little words can change our course) 3:3-5
3. Our Tongues can DESTROY us – Matches & Fire (little words can bring great destruction) 3:5-7
4. Our Tongues can DEFILE us – Pollution (words can be poisonous, harmful, filthy) 3:8-10
5. Our Tongues can DECEIVE us – Hypocrisy (Tree, Vine, & Fountain are known by product) 3:11-12

Knowing that we can be self-deceived and knowing that we have remaining sin within, we need heavenly discernment and wisdom to know how to navigate relational conflict when it arises from our own sinfulness. Wisdom from above allows us to dissect our own hearts so that we see the source of conflict with biblical clarity. **We need the surgical scalpel of Scripture.**



The Wisdom of Heaven & Hell (James 3:13-4:3)

Identifying the cause of relational conflict

James 3:13-18

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good conduct his works in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not coming down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubting, without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James 4:1-3

“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

Matthew 15:19

***For out of the heart** come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.*

“We know that sin begins in the mind (heart). Our proud and fleshly thoughts can be likened to the seeds of conflict. We must do away with these sinful seeds before they spring up and cause conflict. We must replace proud or fleshly thinking if we hope to avoid conflict.”¹

¹ Stuart Scott, Communication and Conflict Resolution: A Biblical Perspective, p. 21.

I. PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR CONFLICT

A. Relational Conflict is Inevitable

Men and women are not only different in many ways, they are also sinners. We are meant to compliment one another and complete one another. However, there will be times when we conflict with one another. Study the “one anothers” in the Bible!

A lack of conflict is not proof of unity, harmony, and oneness. True relational intimacy is forged through the fires of conflict as each person mortifies their own desires, submits themselves to the will of God, and fights for unity and peace through selfless, sacrificial, submissive love.

B. Many Conflicts Can Be Prevented

Proverbs 15:18 “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, But the slow to anger calms a dispute.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 *Love is patient, love is kind, is not jealous, does not brag, is not puffed up; it does not act unbecomingly, does not seek its own, **is not provoked**, does not take into account a wrong suffered; it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...*

Love does not provoke and is not provoked

C. Pursuing Peace with One Another Is Not Optional

Romans 12:18 *If possible, so far as it depends on you, **be at peace with all men**. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord*

Romans 14:19 **we pursue the things which make for peace** and the building up of one another.

Ephesians 4:1-3 *walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, **being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace***

James 3:18 *And the fruit of righteousness is **sown in peace by those who make peace***

D. Conflict Can Be Beneficial ²

1. It can encourage us to search the Scriptures (Psalm 119:71-71).
2. It can help us to consider our beliefs (Proverbs 15:28).
3. It can help us to work hard at improving our communication skills.
4. It can be used by God to produce spiritual growth and endurance (James 1:2-5).
5. It gives us opportunities to practice servanthood and prefer others (Philippians 2:2-4).
6. It gives us an opportunity to glorify God and exemplify Christ (1 Corinthians 10:31-32).

² Stuart Scott, Communication and Conflict Resolution: A Biblical Perspective, p. 21.

II. GOD'S PURPOSE FOR CONFLICT

A. God Allows Conflict to Reveal Our Character

There should be no divisions & there must also be divisions: These verses are speaking directly about the church, but can be applied to the family. In Christ, we have biblical wisdom, Spirit empowering, and born again character enabling, to help us to be peace-making reconcilers. However, the Lord uses conflict (internally & externally) to reveal where our allegiance lies; where our idols exist, where our selfishness and pride still remain, & where our sanctification must proceed. The way we handle conflict reveals our character and our condition.

1 Corinthians 1:10-11 *Now I exhort you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be **no divisions among you**, but that you **be made complete** in the **same mind** and in the **same judgment**.*

1 Corinthians 11:16-19 *But if one is **inclined to be contentious**, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that **divisions exist among you**, and in part I believe it. For **there must also be factions among you**, **so that those who are approved may become evident among you**.*

B. God Allows Conflict to Test Our Faith

1 Peter 1:6-7 *In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been **grieved by various trials**, so that **the proof of your faith**, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, **may be found to result in praise and glory and honor** at the revelation of Jesus Christ*

Romans 5:3-5 *We also **boast in our afflictions**, knowing that **affliction brings about perseverance**; and perseverance, **proven character**; and proven character, **hope**; and **hope does not put to shame**, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us*

C. God Allows Conflict to Make Us More Like Christ

James 1:2-4 *Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter **various trials**, knowing that **the testing of your faith brings about perseverance**. And **let perseverance have its perfect work**, so that **you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing**.*

Philippians 1:6 *For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus*

1 Corinthians 3:18 *But **we all**, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed into the same image** from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit*

III. THE SOURCE OF CONFLICT

We are the source of conflict. Conflict is caused by sinful people thinking, speaking, and doing sinful things. Conflict reveals areas in our lives where pride and selfishness still remain. Conflict is purposed by the Lord to remove pride and selfishness by submission and obedience to Christ.

James 4:1-3 *“What is the **source of quarrels and conflicts** among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you **fight** and **quarrel**. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”*

Proverbs 20:3 *It is a glory for a man to cease quarreling, But any ignorant fool will break out in dispute*

Psalms 139:23-24 *Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;
And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the everlasting way.*

A. Pride – Self Glorification

Proverbs 13:10 *With arrogance comes only quarreling, But with those who receive counsel is wisdom*

Proverbs 28:25-26 *An arrogant man stirs up strife, But he who trusts in Yahweh will be enriched. He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will escape*

Proverbs 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling*

B. Selfishness – Self Gratification

Galatians 5:19-21 *Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

2 Timothy 2:22-26 *Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord’s slave must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may give them repentance leading to the full knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will*

“Conflicts happen when we must have something. Our desires may even be good desires in and of themselves, but when they become demands, they are sinful. When our goal becomes fulfilling our fleshly desires, we will have conflict. A man or woman who is engaged in conflict is focused on self and not on loving his or her spouse and glorifying God.”³

“Conflict always begins with some kind of desire. Unmet desires have the potential of working themselves deeper and deeper into our hearts. The desire becomes something we need or deserve. What we deserve becomes a demand. Idolatrous demands lead us to judge other people when they fail to satisfy our expectations. Idols demand sacrifice. When someone fails to satisfy our demands and expectations, our idle demands that he should suffer. We will find ways to hurt or punish people so that they will give in to our desires.”⁴

The Progression of an Idol

I DESIRE → I DESERVE → I DEMAND → I JUDGE → I PUNISH

In the midst of conflict, ask these questions:

**What do I want so bad that I am willing to sin to get it?
What do I fear so much that I am willing to sin to prevent it?**

C. The Example of Christ – Selfless Humility

Philippians 2:3-8

...doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory, but with **humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves**, not merely looking out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. **Have this way of thinking in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus**, who, although existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied Himself**, by **taking the form of a slave**, by being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled Himself** by becoming **obedient to the point of death**, even death on a cross

1 Peter 2:21-23

For you have been called for this purpose, since **Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps**, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but **kept entrusting Himself to Him** who judges righteously

“A leader must have a servant's heart. And if he has a servant's heart, he will act like a servant and react like a servant when he is treated like a servant.” - Wayne Mack

Additional Notes

³ Stuart Scott, Communication and Conflict Resolution: A Biblical Perspective, p. 19.

⁴ Ken Sande, The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict, p. 102-108.

IV. TYPES OF CONFLICT

A. Personal Differences – Resolution: Show Preference

Conflicts can arise out of personal differences and differences of opinion. People are very different from one another. They have different abilities, different amounts of knowledge, different likes and dislikes, and different perspectives...Having little in common means that you must work to know one another well, appreciate one another, and see things from one another's perspective...A couple can have a great deal in common and still have conflict if they are proud and selfish.”⁵

Romans 12:10 *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; **give preference to one another** in honor*

Philippians 2:3-4 *...with humility of mind **regard one another as more important than yourselves**; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for **the interests of others***

Ephesians 5:21 *...**be subject to one another** in the fear of Christ*

B. When Someone Sins Against You – Resolution: Go, Show, Forgive

We must learn how to respond humbly and graciously to one another's sin and how to follow God's instructions for speaking the truth in love (Proverbs 27:6). We must control our responses to fit God's rules of communication and the proper handling of sin.”⁶

Matthew 18:15-35 “If your brother sins, **go and show** him his fault in private; if he listens to you, **you have won your brother**... Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, **how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?** Up to seven times?” Jesus *said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but **up to seventy times seven**... And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not **forgive his brother from your heart**.”

Colossians 3:12-13 *So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; **bearing with one another, and forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just **as the Lord forgave you**, so also should you.*

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you**

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you **forgive others for their transgressions**, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But **if you do not forgive others**, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

⁵ Stuart Scott, Communication and Conflict Resolution: A Biblical Perspective, p. 15-16.

Matthew 7:1-5 “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, **first take the log out of your own eye,** and **then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye**

Do you bring up everything?

1 Peter 4:8 *Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because **love covers a multitude of sins***

Proverbs 10:12 *Hatred stirs up strife, But **love covers all transgressions***

Proverbs 19:11 *“A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is **his glory to overlook a transgression.**”*

When do you go and show?

- When it is clearly a sin issue and not a preference issue.
- When it is something that is impeding their spiritual growth.
- When it is something that is public knowledge and harming their testimony for Christ.
- When it is leading others to sin.
- When it is hindering your relationship with them.

C. When You Sin Against Someone - Resolution: Confess, Repent, Ask Forgiveness

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there **remember** that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; **first be reconciled to your brother,** and then come and present your offering

James 5:16 ...**confess your sins to one another,** and pray for one another...

We must be **quick** to forgive and **quick** to ask for forgiveness.

Ephesian 4:26-27 *Be angry, and yet do not sin; **do not let the sun go down on your anger,** and **do not give the devil an opportunity***

James 4:6-8 *“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Be subject therefore to God. **Resist the devil and he will flee from you.** Draw near to God and He will draw near to you*

Additional Notes

V. PRINCIPLES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

A. Guidelines for Preventing Conflicts

1. Believe the best about others until you have the facts to prove otherwise
2. Seek to know your spouse well, appreciate and understand their perspective.
3. Make sure you have all of the facts.
4. Listen carefully and learn to ask “clarifying questions.”
5. Develop and use “defusing statements” (these are listed on the last page)
6. Pray, study, and think about the issue before speaking.
7. Determine if you should “go” or “overlook.”

B. Guidelines for Resolving Conflicts

1. State the problem from a biblical perspective.
2. Identify the type of sin and the appropriate description.
3. Decide what things (faults) can be confessed.
4. Assume responsibility for your contribution to the problem.
5. Go and ask forgiveness for each thing you did specifically and discuss your plan not to do those things again.
6. Search for Scripture passages related to the problem.
7. Share what biblical changes you are willing to make in order to reach a resolution.
8. If the problem cannot be resolved in a month, seek outside counsel.

C. How to Seek Forgiveness

1. The Popular Pattern– saying “I’m sorry”
This leaves the issues undefined.
It leaves the offended person wondering if you know what you did.
It does not involve both individuals in the reconciliation.
2. The Biblical Pattern – saying “Will you forgive me for ...?”
Forgiveness is something you must receive from another.
You ask forgiveness for sins, not matters of personal opinion.
You should also state the Biblical attitude or behavior you ought to have exhibited.

D. How to Grant Forgiveness

Forgiveness is an agreement with the one who offended you not to:
Dwell on the offense in your own mind.
Bring up the offense to them or others.
Use the offense against them in the future.

“To forgive someone means to release from liability to suffer punishment or penalty... forgiveness is undeserved and cannot be earned... forgiveness requires that you absorb certain effects of another person’s sins and release the person from liability to punishment. This is precisely what Jesus accomplished at Calvary. He secured our forgiveness by taking on Himself the full penalty of our sins (Isa. 53:4-6; 1 Peter 2:24-25). Remembering what He did to purchase our forgiveness should be our greatest incentive to release others from the penalty they deserve.”⁷

⁷ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*, p. 207-208.

E. The Goal of Conflict Resolution

RESTORATION of the RELATIONSHIP

Galatians 6:1-2

*Brothers, even if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual, **restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness**, each of you looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. **Bear one another's burdens**, and so fulfill the law of Christ*

Luke 15:7,10

*I tell you that in the same way, there will be **more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents** than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance... I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over **one sinner who repents**.*

Luke 15:11-32

*(The Prodigal Son) ...³² we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and **was lost and has been found**.*'

F. The Four G's for Resolving Conflict ⁸

1. Glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Biblical peacemaking is motivated and guided by a deep desire to bring honor to God by revealing the reconciling love and power of Jesus Christ. As we draw on His grace, follow His example, and put His teachings into practice, we can find freedom from the impulsive, self-centered decisions that make conflict worse, and bring praise to God by displaying the power of the gospel in our lives.

2. Get the Log Out of Your Eye (Matthew 7:5)

Attacking others only invites counterattacks. This is why Jesus teaches us to face up to our own contributions to a conflict before we focus on what others have done. When we overlook others; minor offences and honestly admit our own faults, our opponents will often respond in kind. As tensions decrease, the way may be open for sincere discussion, negotiation, and reconciliation.

3. Gently Restore (Galatians 6:1)

When others fail to see their contributions to a conflict, we sometimes need to graciously show them their fault. If they refuse to respond appropriately, Jesus calls us to involve respected friends, church leaders, or other objective individuals who can help us encourage repentance and restore peace.

4. Go and Be Reconciled (Matthew 5:24)

Finally, peacemaking involves a commitment to restoring damaged relationships and negotiating just agreements. When we forgive others as Jesus has forgiven us and seek solutions that satisfy others interests as well as our own, the debris of conflict is cleared away and the door is open for genuine peace.

⁸ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, p. 12-13.

G. Unbiblical Ways to Deal with Conflict ⁹

1. Giving In Without Seeking to Resolve the Conflict

This option is used by a person who would rather “give in” to a wrong solution than to seek to resolve the conflict in a Biblical fashion. Giving in is peace-keeping, not peace-making. It is usually driven by the fear of man or the fear of consequences. “The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted” (Proverbs 29:25).

2. Ignoring the Problem or Pretending It Never Happened

This option pretends that a problem does not exist or responds in a way that does not solve the conflict biblically. Many ignore an issue by attempting to hide, cover up, make excuses, shift blame, or run from the conflict. This may include leaving the house, ending a friendship, quitting a job, filing for divorce, or changing churches. This way of attempting to solve problems goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) when Adam and Eve sinned against God (see outline of “Ignoring the Problem” at the end of the notes).

3. Winning at All Costs

This option desires to be right, or to win, at whatever cost to the relationship. Some people are so determined to win the argument that they will do whatever it takes to make others see things their way or give them their way. This is the “my way or the highway” mentality. This way of silencing the other party is driven by pride, selfishness, arrogance, and obstinance.

4. Letting Time Heal It

Time alone will not heal. Healing alone will not honor God. Confession, forgiveness, and repentance is what will restore the relationship and honor God. Time passes for us but not for God. He wants his children to deal with sin quickly. Usually sin and hurt becomes bigger with the passage of time. Our memories can become very selective and make the resolution process even more difficult.

5. Trying to Bury It or Shelve It

To put off resolving the conflict and reconciling the relationship is not an option. Trying to forget about what happened, or to stay so busy that you don't have time to think, only works for so long. A person who lives this way will most likely accumulate many unresolved issues, which can very easily result in more bitterness, depression, sickness, and sin. Buried issues are usually unearthed by future events. Shelved issues must be taken down and sorted through at some point. The Lord will always press against our unwillingness to deal biblically with conflict.

6. Waiting for the Other Person to Initiate the Resolution Process

This approach is in direct violation of God's command to go and seek to resolve any problem that someone has with you (Matthew 5:23-24). You cannot worship God if you are living in disobedience to his commands. “If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).

7. Punishing the Other Person Until They Change or Take the Blame

People often do various things to punish their spouse until they change and assume the blame. They may give them the silent treatment, be harsh with them, or even leave. This method of dealing with conflict is only heaping sin upon sin.

⁹ Taken from Building Marriages God's Way, p. 38-42 and Stuart Scott, Communication and Conflict Resolution: A Biblical Perspective, p. 24-25.

Helpful Questions

When conflicts arise, ask yourself these questions:

- Where is God in this conflict?
- What is God trying to teach me in the midst of this conflict?
- What can I do differently to make it easier to solve this conflict?
- How might I be contributing to the problem?
- Have I communicated my concerns in a godly way?
- Have I jumped to conclusions?
- Am I really seeking to understand the other person's perspective?
- Am I more focused on changing the other people involved in this conflict than on God changing me?
- Am I focused on serving others or on being served?

Twenty statements to diffuse an argument ¹¹

1. I really appreciate your concern about this.
2. Thank you for being interested in this problem.
3. Am I hearing you correctly? Is this what you are saying?
4. Would you repeat that please?
5. Could you repeat that in a different way?
6. I see this is important to you; therefore, it is to me.
7. Let me think about that for a minute.
8. Thank you for taking time to share this with me.
9. Do you have any suggestions as to what I could do to improve in this area? (Show appreciation!)
10. Did I hear you say it upsets you when I...? (Have a thankful spirit!) Thank you for sharing this with me.
11. Are you saying you want me to discuss issues of this kind with you before I make a decision? (Be thankful!)
12. I am interested in what you are saying, but I'm not clear about what you mean. Could you say it another way?
13. Let me see if I am hearing you correctly.
14. How could I do that differently?
15. What, exactly, is it you see that I am doing; or doing wrong?
16. I was not clearly seeing that.
17. Thank you for bringing that to my attention.
18. I am glad you pointed that out to me.
19. When did that happen? I wasn't aware of that. (Be careful about the use of this statement. Make sure it is true!)
20. I see that is important to you so I'll be sure to make it a priority.

¹¹ Building Marriages God's Way, p. 43-44.