

## JAMES 4:1-10

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.  
You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world  
is hostility toward God?  
Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world  
makes himself an enemy of God.  
Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose:  
"He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?  
But He gives a greater grace.  
Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."  
Submit therefore to God.  
Resist the devil and he will flee from you.  
Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.  
Cleanse your hands, you sinners;  
and purify your hearts, you double-minded.  
Be miserable and mourn and weep;  
let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.  
Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

**Quarrels** – *ongoing or relentless bickering and arguing over unresolved disagreements.*

**Conflicts** – *the individual occasions of bickering and arguing.*

**Your pleasures** – *your sinful, self-indulgent, self-protective longings, desires, passions, and fears which push you to focus on such things as self-protection, a sense of security and well-being, what is self-pleasing, and/or focus on getting what you do not have yet greatly desire.*

**Wage war in your members** – *your sinful, self-indulgent, self-protective longings, desires, passions, and fears are fighting against what you know is right, loving, and good in an effort to compel you to do what is wrong, unloving, and evil in order to gratify your sense of need or calm your fears.*

**You lust and do not have** – *you allow your selfish, self-protective, and relationship damaging desires and/or fears to decide how you are going to feel, think, and act in an effort to satisfy them, yet you are unable to gain the satisfaction you seek.*

**You commit murder** – *you commit relationship murder by pushing people away or pulling away, by treating them as if they are stupid or worthless, by despising or hating them, and by wanting nothing more to do with them (Note: Matthew 5:21-22).*

**You are envious and cannot obtain** – *in other words, you want what someone else has or what others have, even to the point of being jealous of them, or feeling sorry for yourself, and/or being angry (including being angry at God) that you are unable get what they have. And so, in your frustration, disappointment, jealousy, self-pity, and anger, you become unhappy, discontent, ornery, combative, contentious, and argumentative. Once these kind of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes are in place, you are ready to fight and quarrel with almost anyone who gets in the way of what you want – as if they are preventing you from having the happiness you believe you deserve.*

**You fight and quarrel** – *in your frustration over not having or getting what others have, you become unhappy, discontent, ornery, combative, contentious, and argumentative.*

**You do not have because you do not ask** – *you don't turn to God and ask Him to provide what you need.*

**You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures** – *in other words, you don't turn to God and ask Him to provide what you need. The reality is, ingratitude with what you have often produces discontentment which in turn leads you away from God rather than toward God. In moving away from God, you open yourself up to wanting things that work against faith in God, contentment with God, the peace of God, the joy of knowing and engaging in fellowship with God, and godly living. In such cases, God will not give you what you ask for because it will only feed your selfishness and sinful behavior.*

**You adulteresses** – *to be unfaithful to one to whom you have pledged fidelity, and in this case, it is unfaithfulness to God as proven by your desiring, fighting others for, and asking God for things that you can only have or participate in by being unfaithful.*

**Friendship with the world is hostility toward God** – *In this context, the world is the opposite of God and the ways of the world are the opposite of God's ways. Therefore, to be a friend of the world is to openly show the disposition and behavior of an enemy of God, which is manifested by participating in the attitudes, thinking, and ways of the world that are in opposition to God and therefore work against the fulfillment of God's will, ways, and kingdom. In situations where there are two opposing sides (i.e., God's way vs your way), hostility is an act of warfare.*

**Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God** – *we make ourselves God's enemy by willfully and knowingly thinking, speaking, and behaving like the world (**unbelievers**). This is a self-willed, self-ruled action, and the outcome is to put God in the position of having to defend Himself, His will, His ways, and His kingdom from the one making himself God's enemy.*

**He jealously desires the Spirit/spirit which He has made to dwell in us** – *as Christians, God has given us a new nature (Colossians 3:10, 2 Peter 1:4) and the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Our new nature, empowered and led by the indwelling Holy Spirit, makes us capable of loving God as we ought, and living according to God's word and ways, and entering into intimate fellowship with God. Therefore, it is our new nature that God wants for Himself, so much so that He is jealous (Exodus 20:3-6, Deuteronomy 4:23-24) when we involve our new nature in the attitudes, thinking, behaviors, and ways of the world.*

**But He gives a greater grace** – *the grace He extends to us is greater than our adultery and His jealousy over our adultery.*

**God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble** – *when God opposes the proud, He sets himself against the proud so as to work against them and their prideful pursuits. His grace is exhibited in such things as His forgiveness, patience, help, and empowerment.*

**Submit therefore to God** – *submission is an act of humility resulting in humble obedience to the will, the word, and the ways of God.*

**Resist the devil and he will flee from you** – *we resist the devil by refusing to comply with his suggestions, or by countering his deceptive lies with truth, or by fleeing opportunities to gratify ungodly desires, or by guarding against any thinking that opens the door to sin or seeks occasions to sin while at the same time intentionally choosing to remain anchored to God and obedient to His Word. (Note: 1 Cor. 10:13; Luke 4:1-13; Rom. 13:14; Eph. 6:10-17; 2 Tim. 2:22).*

**Draw near to God** – *remove those things from your life that move you away from God and focus on doing those things that bring you closer to God.*

**Cleanse your hands** – *to clean up so that you become godly in the ways you interact with others.*

**Purify your hearts, you double-minded** – *get rid of mixed motives, put a stop to thoughts and desires that are ungodly so that you think about, desire, and do what is loving and godly (Note: Philippians 4:8; Mark 12:31; Romans 12:17-19, 13:10).*

**Be miserable and mourn and weep** – *rather than feeling sad that you are unable to gratify your selfish and sinful desires, feel sad that you have wanted to be and have followed through with choosing selfishness and sin over love and godliness.*

**Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom** – *rather than reveling in and enjoying your selfishness and sin, mourn and feel sad over having done so (Luke 18:13).*

**Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you** – *rather than seeking a better life by exalting yourself, live God's way and He will raise you to a better life.*

### **ROMANS 12:17-18**

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.  
Respect what is right in the sight of all men.  
If possible, so far as it depends on you,  
be at peace with everyone.

### **COLOSSIANS 3:12-14**

(edited from the NASB by DSB)

Therefore, as one who has been chosen by God to be His child,  
and as one who understands what it means to be holy,  
and as one who experiences anew each day God's incomparable love  
put on a heart of compassion,  
kindness, humility,  
gentleness, and patience;  
forbearing with others,  
and forgiving any one who in some way wrongs you,  
just as God has forgiven you.  
And beyond all these things, put on love  
which is the repairing agent of damaged relationships  
and the preserving agent of healthy relationships.

### **MATTHEW 5:9**

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

*NOTE: Most scripture contained in this booklet is taken from the New American Standard Bible  
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## ONE FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH REQUIRED FOR SANE AND SENSIBLE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The degree to which you are mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually healthy is directly proportional to the degree to which you trust that God is good, that what He says about how to live is true, and that if you live according to what God says you will be safe in His hands. In other words, in whatever area or way you don't trust God, in that area or way you become mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually unhealthy – which you verify by making choices and behaving in ways that are selfish, unreasonably self-protective, irrational, self-destructive, and relationship damaging. Therefore, you will only engage in sensible and sane conflict resolution to the degree that you believe God's ways work best and that you are safe when working His ways because He is the one who keeps you safe.

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### FIVE BASIC DEFINITIONS

1. **Love**, in its most basic form, is seeking the good of others. Therefore, to love is to promote and protect the good of everyone who in any way is affected by your choices and behavior. And though love is intended to result in relationships of mutual love and trust, it isn't always reciprocated. Sometimes, love remains one sided, and in such situations no meaningful relationship can be formed. Yet even in those situations, love never fails to be love.
2. **Conflict** is any difference between people or groups of people which actually or seemingly offends the sensibilities of either party (*feelings, beliefs, dignity, convictions, values, opinions, methods, goals, self-worth*), or threatens the well-being of either party (*personal freedom, economic security, social ranking, happiness, orderliness, peacefulness, emotional / mental / physical health, possessions, family, community, nation*).
3. **Relationships which are meaningful and fulfilling** for both parties are based on a mutual commitment to the other's well-being and a mutual trust that the other will live up to his commitment.
4. **Peacemaker**: One who draws parties together by helping them (1) face the truth about their conflict causing words and deeds, (2) confess their part in the conflict, (3) seek and give forgiveness, (4) work toward a mutually beneficial resolution, (5) restore mutual respect, (6) renew mutual love, and (7) rebuild mutual trust.
5. **Peacekeeper**: (*A definition for this study*) One who creates an environment that enables two warring, opposing, or disgruntled parties to co-exist as if there was peace between them even though the relationship remains damaged, the conflict remains unresolved, mutual love remains unrestored, and mutual trust is non-existent. Though such an environment may appear to be peaceful, it is not true peace but rather a fragile form of false peace.

# INTRODUCTORY TRUTHS TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. Too often, our patterns of either-or thinking, or of competitive and win-lose forms of dealing with conflict create more conflict or cause conflict to continue unresolved.
2. Too often, the parties most directly/personally invested in a dispute (*i.e., emotionally or financially*) are the least able or the least cooperative when it comes to settling the dispute fairly. This is one reason why third-party involvement in conflict resolution is helpful.
3. Conflict exists in the tension between *my way* and *your way*. Conflict erupts as we seek to either control (*fight*) or distance ourselves (*flight*) from those who are different from us or who disagree with us. The most common response to conflict is avoidance.
4. **Passive people** tend to see the aggressive/assertive method of dealing with conflict as impolite, unkind, unloving, or outright angry and are therefore reluctant to engage in conflict resolution with such people. **Aggressive people** tend to view the indirect/passive method of dealing with conflict as weak, dishonest, evasive, uncooperative, and therefore ineffective.
5. The more **aggressive** a person, the more he prefers directness, frankness, clarity, confrontation, and self-disclosure. The more **passive** or **easy-going** a person is, the more he prefers to be indirect, ambiguous, cautious, non-self-disclosing, non-confrontational, and non-argumentative when dealing with conflict.
  - A. **Passive persons** tend to expect the other party to know (*without being told*) what is bothering them, and are inclined to talk in general, nebulous terms that do not clearly state the problem or need. They are focused on maintaining acceptance, approval, and a semblance of peace so they can feel safe and accepted even though the conflict remains unresolved. In fact, passive persons are content to allow a conflict to go unresolved as long as both parties will act as if there is peace between them.
  - B. **Aggressive persons** tend to use a confrontational, direct, clearly stated, logic based, and sometimes angry negotiating style. They are focused on righting the wrongs and fighting for justice – which is why they believe they are right, why their solution is the only equitable one, and why the conflict must be resolved immediately.
6. When two individuals in conflict use differing styles of dealing with conflict, it significantly increases the probability of misunderstanding, hurt feelings, anger, resentment, withdrawal from the process by one party, and therefore the failure to come to a mutually agreeable, relationship restoring resolution.
7. An atmosphere of competition inevitably increases anxiety, self-protection, self-justification, and the urgency for victory. Competition turns conflict resolution into an **EITHER-OR, WIN-LOSE**, and therefore an **ADVERSARIAL** process. It degenerates thinking, attitudes, communication, and solutions to me over you, my way over your way, and what's best for me over what is best for both of us. The conflict is then diverted from the immediate issue of seeking a mutually agreeable and beneficial resolution that restores the relationship to who is going to win – which further damages the relationship by promoting suspicion and hostility between the parties.
8. When seeking a resolution that will both last and restore the relationship to a healthy, mutually satisfying condition, dealing with interests/needs is far more effective than proving who is right.

## A PERSONAL PROFILE OF DEALING WITH CONFLICT

The proverbs listed below can be thought of as descriptions of different strategies for resolving conflicts. These proverbs reflect traditional/folk wisdom for dealing with conflict. Read each proverb carefully. Using the scale shown below, indicate how typical each proverb is of **YOUR ACTIONS** in a conflict.

5 = VERY TYPICAL *of the way I act when in conflict.*

4 = FREQUENTLY TYPICAL...

3 = SOMETIMES TYPICAL...

2 = SELDOM TYPICAL...

1 = NEVER TYPICAL...

1. \_\_\_\_\_ It is easier to refrain (*avoid altogether*) than to retreat from a quarrel.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ If you cannot make a person think as you do, make him do as you think.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Soft words win hard hearts.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Come now and let us reason together.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ When two quarrel, the person who keeps silent first is the most praiseworthy.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Might makes things right.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Smooth words make smooth ways.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Better half a loaf than no bread at all.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Truth lies in knowledge, not in majority opinion.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ He hath conquered well that hath made his enemies flee.
13. \_\_\_\_\_ Kill your enemies with kindness.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ A fair exchange brings no quarrel.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ No person has the final answer, but every person has a piece to contribute.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ Stay away from people who disagree with you.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ Fields are won by those who believe in winning.
18. \_\_\_\_\_ Kind words are worth much and cost little.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ Tit for tat is fair play.
20. \_\_\_\_\_ Only the person who is willing to give up his monopoly on truth can ever profit from the truths that others hold.
21. \_\_\_\_\_ Avoid quarrelsome people as they will only make your life miserable.
22. \_\_\_\_\_ A person who will not flee will make others flee.
23. \_\_\_\_\_ Soft words ensure harmony.
24. \_\_\_\_\_ One gift for another makes good friends.
25. \_\_\_\_\_ Bring your conflicts into the open and face them directly; only then will the best solution be discovered.
26. \_\_\_\_\_ The best way of handling conflicts is to avoid them.
27. \_\_\_\_\_ Put your foot down where you mean to stand.

- 28.\_\_\_\_\_ Gentleness will triumph over anger.
  - 29.\_\_\_\_\_ Getting part of what you want is better than not getting anything at all.
  - 30.\_\_\_\_\_ Frankness, honesty, and trust will move mountains.
  - 31.\_\_\_\_\_ There is nothing so important you have to fight for it.
  - 32.\_\_\_\_\_ There are two kinds of people in the world: winners & losers.
  - 33.\_\_\_\_\_ When one hits you with a stone, hit him with a piece of cotton.
  - 34.\_\_\_\_\_ When both people give in half way, a fair settlement is achieved.
  - 35.\_\_\_\_\_ By digging and digging, the truth is discovered.
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### SCORING: HOW I DEAL WITH CONFLICT

Avoidance	Competing or Forcing	Accommodat- ing	Compromis- ing	Confronting or Collaborating
1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>

The higher the score for a particular conflict strategy, the more frequently you tend to use that strategy. The lower the score for a particular conflict strategy, the less frequently you tend to use that strategy.



Based on the conflict just described, which response (*win, yield, compromise, withdraw, confront*) has been your predominant response to this conflict? Explain why you have chosen this response as your primary response?

**Predominant Response:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why I chose it:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you believe your response is bringing the two of you together to resolve the conflict and restore the relationship or working against it? If so, how so. If not, why not.

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## CONFLICT'S PERCEIVED THREAT TO OUR SENSE OF WELL-BEING

Because conflict takes place between two or more people, how we deal with conflict either positively or negatively affects the quality of the relationship that exists between the disputants. When conflict threatens our sense of well-being by threatening core issues we hold dear (*which it often does*), it makes conflict resolution and the restoration of relationship that much more difficult. Examples of core issues are as follows:

1. Beliefs – be they rational, irrational, religious, political, scientific, or cultural.
2. Values.
3. Personal pleasure, happiness, convenience, and ease.
4. Need – be the need real or imagined, reasonable or unreasonable.
5. Security, peaceful environment, protection from loss – whether the threat is real or imagined.
6. Self-worth – as measured by receiving approval and acceptance, being seen as right, being respected, being held in high esteem, being praised as opposed to criticized, being the focus of attention.
7. Justice, fairness, and equality.
8. Selfishness, self-centeredness, being in control.
9. Fears – be they real or unreal, rational or irrational.

Because core issues are so important to us, we tend to protect or preserve them at the first sign of attack. Therefore, common unproductive and ungodly responses to conflict include:

1. Minimizing or removing disapproval by claiming innocence, or having only good intentions, or blaming the other party, or defending our words and actions.
2. Promoting or affirming self-worth by trying to convince the other party that we are the good person in this situation, or that we meant well in spite of how our words and/or actions turned out.
3. Asserting or maintaining control in order to assure our desired outcome.
4. Appease or comply in order to regain a peaceful environment,
5. Using ungodly, relationship damaging means to correct injustice, demand what is fair, fight for equality.
6. Cutting our losses by diminishing or ending the relationship.

As ought to be obvious, overlooking these core issues or failing to deal with them accordingly leads to an unsatisfying agreement for at least one of the disputants, which in turn results in at least one party failing to live up to the agreement long-term. When this happens, you are back to having an unresolved conflict that is doing damage to the relationship.

When our **primary concern** is our own happiness, security, self-worth, or other core issues like those stated above, we see **victory over** or **distance from** the offender (*including ending the relationship*) as the most reasonable response to conflict.



When we believe **victory over** the other party is the best response, we feel justified in unleashing strong feelings, harsh words, cruel criticisms, put-downs, exaggerated accusations, threats, and even physical abuse. Each of these responses may bring the victory desired, but they always diminish, damage, and sometimes end the relationship.

When we believe **distance from** the other party is the most reasonable response to conflict, we feel justified in using silence, coolness, indifference, unfriendliness, withdrawal, and avoidance. Though these responses are self-protective, they are also relationship destructive.



Generally speaking, we choose **victory over** or **distance from** the other party out of a selfish concern for our own well-being or interests. In other words, we are looking out for our own good at the expense of the other person and the relationship. We are saying that “my” personal happiness or sense of well-being is more important than “you” and “our” relationship. We are behaving as if “my” well-being (*sense of control, feelings of peace, gaining pleasure, avoidance of the unpleasant*) is so important that it makes disposing the relationship a reasonable option. When relationships are seen as disposable, these kinds of self-protective, relationship damaging responses to conflict seem rational.

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## OTHER VITAL ISSUES AFFECTING CONFLICT

1. **What we know, we know. What we believe, value, or hold as guiding principles, we do.** Knowledge is not the direct motivator of behavior. Our personal beliefs, values, and principles are the most significant factors motivating our behavior. We can know something and agree that it is true, and even agree it is the right thing to do. But that does not mean we believe in it or value it to the extent of being willing to live accordingly. The surest way to discover what you believe, what you value, and the principles by which you live is to thoughtfully observe what you do.
2. **Our behavior is not the direct result of a given stimulus.** Circumstances or other people are not the direct motivator of behavior. Our behavior is the direct result of what we believe or value or tell ourselves about a given stimulus (*situation, person*). For example, people, or people’s behavior, do not make us mad. We get mad based on what we believe or value in relation to that person or that person’s behavior.

STIMULUS	BELIEFS, VALUES, PRINCIPLES	RESPONSE
<p data-bbox="298 386 441 415">Criticized</p> <p data-bbox="196 537 545 567">Treated with disrespect</p>	<p data-bbox="802 407 841 491">?</p>	<p data-bbox="1133 348 1398 420">Defend or put yourself down</p> <p data-bbox="1073 466 1455 646">Hurt, angry, withdraw from or verbally attack the one who showed disrespect and pointed out my flaws.</p>

3. **“Your actions speak so loud I cannot hear what you say.”** Certain words and deeds **done once** are enough to label us. But in most cases, it is our **repetitive words/deeds** that label us. Therefore, with rare exception you make your own reputation by how you behave. Be honest about your self-made reputation and the message it sends.
4. **There is a distinct difference between premeditated murder and manslaughter.** However, manslaughter committed on a repetitive basis against the same person or group of people begins to feel like premeditated murder to them. Once the offender is clearly shown how his behavior is hurting others and therefore should be stopped, it is no longer manslaughter when committed. It is irresponsible, uncaring, reckless murder which now may be treated as if it were premeditated.
5. **No one likes pain.** Yet if we choose a sinful / self-serving approach to conflict, we will inflict more suffering upon ourselves. If we choose a godly, relationship building approach to conflict, we are likely to still experience unwanted suffering – because the other party may not join us in resolving the conflict and reconciling the relationship. However, it is always better to suffer for righteous, noble, and good purposes than to suffer for foolish, selfish, or sinful purposes. Therefore, learn the difference between:
  - a. **QUICK FIXES:** methods and solutions which bring immediate relief from current pain or ensure protection from future pain without resolving the conflict and restoring the relationship (*i.e., living in denial, passively yielding to the aggressor, using aggression, threats, abuse*). Though such methods can forestall your misery (*delay until some time in the future*), they do not remove it, but rather add to it.
  - b. **REAL FIXES:** methods and solutions that deal with reality, resolve issues, solve problems, and protect or restore relationships. Such methods will include uncomfortable, even unwanted feelings and conversations, but they solve differences, promote forgiveness, heal hurts, restore trust, and strengthen relationships so that the future is more satisfying for both parties.

6. **When trust is eroded, love is eroded.** When there is conflict, try to resolve it as soon as possible so trust is not eroded. It is irrational to trust without a good reason to trust. Therefore, eroded trust must be repaired and a tarnished reputation must be renewed through repetitive displays of trustworthy behavior. Yet no one can re-earn trust unless the offended party opens the “door of trust” enough for trust to be re-earned. It takes both parties working together to restore trust and revitalize love.
  
7. **Complete trust in the goodness of God and the reliability of God’s Word is essential for emotional, mental, and spiritual health, as well as healthy relationships.** At whatever point you think God will not protect your interests, or at whatever point you think obedience to His Word will cause you to miss out on longed for pleasures or leave you vulnerable to the schemes and injustice of others, you will depart from doing things God’s way and resort to doing things your own way in order to promote or protect your interests. Since God’s way of thinking and behaving is based on love, to depart from God’s way leaves only one other way – selfishness (*seeking the good of self as your first concern and then seeking the good of others only as it fits into your first concern*). Therefore, selfishness is a form of insanity which works against emotional, mental, and spiritual health as well as healthy relationships.
  
8. **Beware of self-deception.** It is motivated by self-centeredness. It is a self-imposed. And it is perpetuated by distrust of God, dishonest thinking, a self-serving interpretation of events, irrational conclusions, and an exaggerated need to feel good about yourself. It is the most difficult deception to overcome because it is self-constructed in the shape of your own tainted view of reality and truth. Therefore, it is a self-made curse.

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## IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Who is helped the **most**, or whose interests are **primarily** served by your current method of responding to conflict?

MYSELF \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER PARTY \_\_\_\_\_ BOTH OF US \_\_\_\_\_

EXPLAIN HOW AND WHY: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IS RELATIONSHIP CENTERED**

1. The ultimate purpose of God's law is the establishment and preservation of relationships built on love (and as we've already established, love and trust are inseparable). (Mark 12:28-31; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; I Timothy 1:5; James 2:8)
  - A. **MARK 12:28-31**

And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."
  - B. **ROMANS 13:8-10**

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.
  - C. **GALATIANS 5:14**

For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
  - D. **I TIMOTHY 1:5**

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.
  - E. **JAMES 2:8**

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.
2. The primary goal of Christ's death is to make it possible for us to be reconciled to God and share a relationship of mutual love and trust with Him forever.
  - A. **2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-20**

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
3. God's instruction concerning the behavior of husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees, and Church members shows He intends for us to value, nurture, and protect relationships of the most basic kind and at the most basic level. (Ephesians 5:21-32; 6:1-9; 4:2-3)
  - A. **EPHESIANS 5:21-32**

...and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the

head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

**B. EPHESIANS 6:1-4**

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

**C. EPHESIANS 6:5-9**

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. And, masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

**D. EPHESIANS 4:1-3**

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4. Jesus taught that we must forgive those who sin against us if we are to experience God's forgiveness after sinning against Him. Forgiveness is a vital ingredient in the restoration of any relationship, including our relationship with God. (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-35)

**A. MATTHEW 6:14-15**

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

**B. MATTHEW 18:21-35**

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. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying,

'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

5. Jesus taught that restoration of broken relationships are to be put before worship. To do otherwise is to be a hypocritical or false worshiper, because you cannot genuinely worship (*in spirit and in truth*) a god whose values are contrary to yours. Neither can you genuinely worship a god whose ways and commands you do not trust. God is a god of relationships – reconciled, loving, and meaningful relationships. You are only pretending to worship Him if you do not value relationships as He does. (Matthew 5:21-26)

**A. MATTHEW 5:21-26**

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. If therefore 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 your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent."

6. God teaches that we are not to take another Christian to court. Rather, we are to settle our disputes with other Christians within the community of believers. Therefore, if we cannot settle our disputes one-on-one, we are to get help from other Christians in resolving the difference and restoring the relationship. (1 Corinthians 6:1-8)

**A. 1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-8**

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life? If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide

between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren.

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## **GOD'S MODEL FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT AND RESTORING RELATIONSHIPS**

### **GO TO THE PERSON YOU ARE IN CONFLICT WITH**

**FIRST PRIVATELY . . . . . MATTHEW 18:15**

"And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

**IF NEEDED, WITH ANOTHER PERSON(S) . . . . . MATTHEW 18:16**

"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.

**IF NEEDED, ASK THE CHURCH FOR HELP . . . . . MATTHEW 18:17**

"And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a taxgatherer.

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## **FAILURE TO LOVE IN GOD'S WAY PUTS US OUT OF GOD'S WAY**

**I JOHN 2:9-11**

The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

**I JOHN 4:7-8**

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

**I JOHN 4:19-21**

We love, because He first loved us. 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. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

## **REASONS TO GET HELP IN RESOLVING OUR DIFFERENCES**

When you have tried your best, yet cannot resolve a conflict in a mutually loving and beneficial way, it is time to ask for help. A third party can see things either you or your opponent may have missed. A third party can calmly and in an unbiased way appeal to both sides to see their part in creating and perpetuating the conflict. A third party can exhort and encourage both sides to do what is necessary to resolve the conflict and restore the relationship. And a third party can offer fresh, better, or reworked and therefore improved solutions than those previously considered.

When you are so emotionally involved that you cannot think straight, or you are so gripped with fear that you will come out a loser that you quarrel and fight instead of resolve and restore, it is time to ask for help. An unbiased third party will protect the interests of both sides and help you seek a mutually agreeable solution to the conflict.

When you can only come up with one or two possible solutions and none of them seems right or fair, you need a third party with fresh eyes who can help both sides brainstorm ideas until there are a number of solutions to consider before settling on the one that is best for both of you.

When the other person is aggressive enough or persistent enough or smooth enough to talk you into a solution that favors them, you need a third party who will help each side tell their story as clear and understandable as possible, who will assure each side is heard and understood, who will protect both parties from being taken advantage of, and who will promote a fair yet reasonable resolution and path to restoring the relationship.

In addition, a third party can help you keep self-interest, pride, resentment, and anger in their proper place. A third party can help you remain faithful to God and His Word. A third party can help you remember the value of the relationship and how God wants you to treat relationships. When you want to give up, a third party can encourage perseverance, going the extra mile, trying another way, or finding new options for resolving the conflict.

Finally, because conflict tests our trust in God and the conviction that living according to God's word actually works, a third party can remind you that protecting your own interests and promoting your own happiness, first and foremost, is not only distrust of God and a willful disregard of God's word, it is also a significant impediment to mutually beneficial and therefore lasting conflict resolution.

## **GOOD COMMUNICATION A VITAL PART OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Communication is one of the most important factors in human relationships. It has many parts: choice of words, tone of voice, how loud we speak, our emphasis on certain words, hushed expressions, facial expressions, hand gestures, body movements, and silence.

The goal of good communication is to speak **clearly** (*clearly stating what you want to say*), **honestly** (*tell the truth – don't exaggerate the truth to make your point or withhold some of the truth to keep the other person happy with you*), and **respectfully** (*use respectful language*), while at the same time speaking in a way that helps – by making it easier or safer – the other person hear what we are saying. It is in this way that we show love and respect for others, and in so doing, improve the probability of them joining the conversation in a meaningful and productive way. And finally, honesty can include being honest about our own thoughts and feelings (*when appropriate*), and being honest about the behavior of others and its effect on us (*when necessary*).

When speaking to adults (*this doesn't apply to children*), we ought to give them the freedom to respond however they choose – at least in most cases. Therefore, speak as if inviting them rather than demanding or threatening them.

There are basically three types of communication: aggressive, passive, and good (*or godly and therefore responsible*) communication. The type of communication we choose in a given encounter indicates what we believe, value, fear, and/or hope in relation to the person(s) or situation and what we are trying to accomplish in that encounter.

Aggressive communication is the use of strength or power to overwhelm, intimidate, or manipulate others. The purpose of aggressive communication is to make other people think and/or act according to the way we want them to think and act. Aggressive communication is self-serving communication, and it is motivated by selfishness.

Passive communication is the use of gentle, pleasing, most often vague, and intentionally appeasing language that avoids confrontation, argument, anger, and hostility by giving the appearance of approval, cooperation, acceptance, and even sincere agreement. The purpose of passive communication is to maintain or gain the approval of others and keep an atmosphere of peace – all for the sake of the one communicating passively. Therefore, passive communication is self-serving communication, and in spite of how sweet sounding and seemingly compliant it is, it is motivated by selfishness.

Good communication is the use of honesty (*dealing truthfully with descriptions of behavior, situations, feelings, beliefs, values, and the principles by which one lives*), respect, gentleness, gracious firmness when necessary, empathy, and impartial listening for the purpose of understanding the other person and their side of the story or situation in order to seek the good of everyone involved. The purpose of good communication is to provide an atmosphere in which relationships can develop and be maintained, people can continue to grow in maturity and

godliness, and the good of the community is promoted or protected. Good communication provides the opportunity for two-way communication, identification of the real issues, discovery of what the other person thinks and feels, mutually agreeable solutions to conflict, and affirmation of mutual respect and trust. Good communication is motivated by love – love which seeks the good of everyone who is in any way affected by our choices and behavior.

It is difficult to express ourselves in kind, respectful, seek the good of everyone ways when we are feeling under pressure, frustrated, irritated, threatened, angry, hurt, rejected, put down, helpless, discouraged, or other such things. However, it is possible to resist and/or reject these kinds of feelings so that you do not act according to them. The first and foremost way to do that is to make God your first and foremost source of security, love, inner peace, and sense of well-being. A second helpful way to remain calm and godly in the face of such feelings is to use a method of communication that takes you out of the fight, helps the other person hear what you are saying, and invites them to join you in looking for reasonable and mutually beneficial solutions that resolve the conflict and restore the relationship. That method of communication is called I-Statements.

**I-statements** give us a format for expressing negative feelings, disappointments, observations, and complaints about a person or his behavior without attacking or belittling or condemning the person themselves. This makes it easier for the other person to hear what we have to say and helps them feel safer in looking for a resolution, rather than becoming defensive.

#### **THE I-STATEMENT FORMULA HAS FOUR PARTS:**

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>WHEN:</b>            | We objectively, honestly, kindly describe the other person's behavior.                   |
| <b>THE EFFECTS ARE:</b> | We describe how the other person's behavior actually affected or continues to affect us. |
| <b>I FEEL:</b>          | We describe how it made us feel.   |
| <b>I'D PREFER:</b>      | We describe what we want.  |

**For example:** “When you drive too close to the car in front of you or weave in and out of traffic, I feel so unsafe that I cannot enjoy our time together. I’d prefer that our time in the car would be comfortable for both us so we can make the most of enjoying each other’s company.

The ‘**I FEEL**’ part is intended to help others understand how their behavior is affecting you. However, if expressing your feelings at this time will make it harder for the other person to hear what you are saying, or give them the impression you are trying to play on their sympathies to get what you want, do not express the ‘I feel’ part.

The ‘**ID PREFER**’ part gives an opportunity to offer your ideas for dealing with the situation. However, if that means squashing the other person’s input (*i.e., a passive person*), then you should give them the opportunity to express their ideas first.

One final word of caution. I-Statements are not intended to be used as a kinder, more mannerly method to get your way. And I-Statements do not always produce the desired results. The other person may not care how well you say something, or they may not be listening due to being so focused on getting the outcome they want. The reason to use I-statements is to provide the best possible opportunity for the other party to hear what you are saying and join you in a process that works toward a mutually beneficial resolution to the conflict and the restoration of the relationship.

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## LISTENING A VITAL PART OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Telling your side of the story, expressing your opinions, feelings, and wants is an important part of conflict resolution. However, it is only one part of the process. There is another part that is just as important – listening to the other person’s side of the story.

Listening is more than hearing words and showing you are paying attention by looking the person in the eye and occasionally saying “huh, huh,” as they talk. Listening is trying to understand **how** the other person sees a particular situation, **how** they feel about it, **why** they see it that way, **what** they would like, and **why** they want what they would like. This requires listening beyond the words themselves. To discover the “hows,” the “whats” and the “whys,” we must listen to the speaker’s **choice of words**, the **feelings** expressed with their words, the **tone** and **volume** with which their words are spoken, and the **body language** that accompanies their words. When we listen this way, we are more likely to catch the true intent of the other person’s words.

Once we think we understand what the other person is saying, the next step is to verify that what we think we’ve heard is what the other person actually meant to say. We do this by reflecting back what we think is the essence of the message we’ve just heard. This provides an opportunity for the speaker to either affirm we’ve heard correctly or to make corrections to what they said by trying again to say what they meant to say.

This step is vital to assuring both sides are accurately understood and to assuring neither side is operating under wrong or false assumptions. Therefore, it is important to listen with the goal of understanding the other person’s story or reasoning or explanation. Listening to understand is best done when we treat the listening part as if it were a fact-finding exercise rather than a cross-examination or the means of figuring out how to prove them wrong or to show them our way of resolving the difference is the better way.

Verifying is an easy process. It is done by reflecting back to the speaker the essence of what you heard him say. It can be done like this:

**“What I just heard you say is . . .”**

**“Are you saying . . .?”**

**“Tell me more about . . .”**

After reflecting what you heard, give the speaker an opportunity to agree with you or correct your perception of what was said. Through this verifying/clarifying process, both the speaker and the hearer can come to an accurate understanding of what the speaker wants to communicate.

If you are the listener, do not tell the speaker what he is trying to say. Stick to reflecting what you heard and let the speaker decide if what you heard is what he wanted to communicate. This shows respect for the speaker and a commitment to restoring the relationship. If in the clarification process the speaker says something inconsistent with what he previously said, show the inconsistency and give him the opportunity to clarify or correct himself.

If you find it difficult to understand what the other person is trying to tell you, try one of these two questions to bring clarification to the discussion. Ask:

**“Could you give me an example?”**

**“I’m confused about \_\_\_\_\_. Could you tell me again in a different way, or with different words?”**

If you are the speaker and what was heard is not what you meant to say, simply correct it. Do not criticize or blame the listener for not hearing you correctly. The goal is to resolve your differences and restore the relationship, not prove your superiority, or prove your innocence in the matter, or prove the inferiority of the listener. An aggressive or condemning attitude will frustrate or stop the resolution process. Kindness, gentleness, and humility are qualities that will promote cooperation in seeking a resolution.

Depending on the length of the other person’s story or explanation, you may need to verify/clarify several times during the story telling. Stick to verifying so the verifying process does not derail the speaker’s opportunity to tell his side of the story.

The verifying/clarifying process does not mean that the listener agrees with what the speaker is saying, it only means the listener accurately understands what the speaker is saying. Discussing areas of disagreement can take place after the speaker is accurately understood by the listener. Bear in mind that an accurate understanding of what is being said is vital to resolving differences. Differences cannot be resolved if what we think we hear the other person saying is not really what he is saying or means to say.

Careful listening takes time and effort. But it is better to take the extra time and make the extra effort so that clear understanding can lead to real solutions in resolving differences.

Listening to yourself is just as important as listening to the other party in conflict with you. This offers you the opportunity to examine your own intentions, fears, concerns, beliefs, and expectations as revealed by the way you tell your side of the story. And listening to yourself gives you insight into how you are most probably being heard. It is wise to listen to your **words** (*conciliatory, red flag, clear, vague, sarcastic*), **tone of voice** (*demanding, harsh, fearful, respectful, disrespectful, too loud, too soft*), and your **story** (*attacking and blaming, defending and justifying, or explaining your point of view*).

*The foundational material source for the information on communication and listening comes from Arthur J. Lange and Patricia Jakubowski, Responsible Assertive Behavior - Cognitive / Behavioral Procedures for Trainers. Research Press Co., 2612 N. Mattis Ave., Champaign, IL 61820.*

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## HELPING THE OTHER PERSON COMMUNICATE

Sometimes the other person chooses silence and/or distance as their primary response to something we have said or done. When this happens it is difficult to discover what is wrong, how to repair the damage done, and restore the relationship. However, instead of accepting their silence and/or distance as their final answer, or instead of assuming we know what their response means, we can go to them and ask if they are willing to express their feelings and thoughts about what we've said or done. How we approach them is important for helping them feel safe in talking about it. Therefore, asking non-demanding, non-judgmental questions often helps the other person open up and tell his side of the story. Some examples are:

**“Would you be willing to respond to what I’ve said/done?”**

**“It would help me to know how you feel about what I’ve done/been saying.”**

**“What are your thoughts (*or feelings*) about what I’ve said/done?”**

Demonstrating empathy (*through questions or statements*) with how you suspect the other person may be feeling or thinking makes it even easier for him to feel safe in expressing his feelings and thoughts. For example:

**“Are you wishing this would all go away so you wouldn’t have to talk about it?”**

**“It’s possible you’re feeling like you’d rather be left alone right now.”**

**“Are you feeling upset or angry with me?”**

Asking for the other person’s reactions to what we’ve said or done shows him we are open and interested in hearing what he has to say. Empathizing helps him believe we can identify at least somewhat with how he is feeling about us and/or the situation.

Sometimes, a negative, defensive, attacking or angry reaction on the other person’s part means we have been misunderstood. There are usually identifiable reasons for this breakdown in communication.

1. Possibly we have not clearly said what we wanted to say and it was taken in a way we did not mean it to be taken.
2. Sometimes others hear us through their own filters – filters based on past experiences, previous hurts, fears, assumptions about our intentions, long-standing beliefs about people who say or do what they think we’ve said or done – which distorts in their mind what we actually said.
3. Sometimes people hear our requests as demands, our suggestions as personal criticism, or our disagreement as disrespect or rejection.

For these reasons and others like them it helps to ask what the other person is hearing us say. For example:

**“I’ve been trying to tell you something, what have you been hearing me say?”**

**“I’ve been talking for awhile; what do you think I am trying to tell you?”**

When we’ve been misunderstood and discover it, we can clarify what we meant to say. An example is:

**“I’m sorry it sounded like I was saying it is all your fault and that I think you are a jerk. Actually, I appreciate many things about you, and I value our relationship. It is just this one area where I would appreciate a cooperative effort in resolving our differences so we can have an even better relationship.”**

Asking the other person to paraphrase what he heard is an excellent way to clear up misunderstandings. Empathizing is a good way to help the other person believe we understand and care about how he is feeling. Yet at the same time we should want to improve our communication skills. Therefore, learning what others are hearing can reinforce our good communication while exposing our peculiar, self-serving, unkind, counter-productive, and relationship destructive forms of communication. Learning such things gives us the opportunity to strengthen the good and change the bad forms of communication into forms that help our communication, conflict resolution, and relationship efforts.

## IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Read the following scripture verses and describe how they apply to speaking and listening.

**PROVERBS 12:18** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PROVERBS 15:1** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PROVERBS 15:28** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PROVERBS 17:27** \_\_\_\_\_

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**PROVERBS 18:2, 13, 17** \_\_\_\_\_

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**EPHESIANS 4:25, 29, 31-32** \_\_\_\_\_

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# **RIGHT ATTITUDES TOWARD DIFFERENCES**

## **I DIFFER FROM YOU**

but that doesn't mean I am rejecting you,  
or that I don't value our relationship.

So hear what I am saying  
without feeling disrespected  
or rejected  
or worthless  
or unloved.

## **YOU DIFFER FROM ME**

but that doesn't mean  
I am wrong and you're right,  
or that I am less and you are more,  
or that we cannot value each other and enjoy our relationship.  
So after saying what you want me to hear,  
listen to what I have to say.  
And after listening to each other,  
let's work out our differences  
in a way that preserves our respect and love for each other.

# **RIGHT ATTITUDES TOWARD DISAGREEMENT**

## **I DISAGREE WITH YOU**

but that doesn't mean I am attacking you,  
or that I care about you any less than when I am agreeing with you.  
So hear what I am saying  
without feeling put down  
or condemned  
or that there is nothing I like about you.

## **YOU DISAGREE WITH ME**

but it is alright for people to disagree  
as long as they do not let their disagreement  
drive them apart.  
So I will listen to you  
without feeling attacked or offended  
knowing that you want to be understood as much as I do.  
Then you can listen to me,  
and we can work toward a resolution  
that will help our relationship grow  
rather than stagnate or die.

# **RIGHT ATTITUDES TOWARD CONFRONTING**

## **I MUST CONFRONT YOU**

not because I am angry with you,  
though I may be,  
but because I love you and care about what happens to you  
and to our relationship.

So hear what I am saying  
without getting defensive and hostile  
or growing silent and withdrawing  
or thinking I am just being critical.  
Hear me as one who cares about you  
and wants continued relationship with you.

## **YOU ARE CONFRONTING ME**

and it hurts to hear some of the things you are saying.

But I want to know what I am doing to hurt you  
because you matter to me.

So I will listen,  
resisting the temptation to defend and attack back  
or walk away and act as if you don't matter to me.

I care about you,  
and I don't want to hurt you.  
Let's work this out together  
so we can grow closer together.

# **RIGHT ATTITUDES TOWARD CHANGE**

## **I AM ASKING YOU TO CHANGE**

for the sake of our relationship.  
However, I realize it will take time and hard work  
before lasting change is achieved.  
Therefore, I am not asking you  
to be perfect immediately  
or to put in the hard work  
without my patient support and encouragement.  
Nor am I asking you to ignore changes I need to make.

## **YOU ARE ASKING ME TO CHANGE**

and I will do my best  
because I care about you and our relationship, too.  
But relationships are not one-sided.  
So join me in setting goals for changes we both need to make.  
Join me in tracking our progress  
so we can see how far we've come  
and how far we still need to go.  
Let's help each other when we are weak.  
After failure, let's renew trust rather than nurture suspicion.  
Let's work through this together for the sake of our relationship.

## IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Describe your present attitude toward conflict. \_\_\_\_\_

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What part of your attitude toward conflict should you change? \_\_\_\_\_

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What would your new attitude look like? \_\_\_\_\_

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Describe the right attitude toward confronting. \_\_\_\_\_

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What part of your attitude toward confronting should you change? \_\_\_\_\_

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What would your new attitude look like? \_\_\_\_\_

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## FORGIVENESS – IT TAKES TWO

Forgiveness is primarily defined as: “giving up any claim to repayment or punishment along with any feelings of resentment, bitterness, anger, the desire for revenge, or the desire for alienation.”

**Resentment:** bitter brooding, smoldering ill-will, contempt, open or hidden hatred.

**Bitterness:** an extreme form of resentment producing hatred, hostility, and separation.

**Anger:** strong feelings, emotions, and/or thoughts of displeasure over a real or imagined injustice, mistreatment, neglect or other form of perceived wrong. Ungodly anger is unrighteous, unjust, unfair, and partial.

**Revenge:** to get even, hurt back, make them suffer for what they did to you.

**Alienation:** withdrawal, emotional separation, physical separation (*such as divorce*).

The **primary motivation for forgiveness** on our part is a mixture of love and gratitude – love for God and His ways along with love for others like the love we have for ourselves mixed with gratitude for God’s graciously merciful dealings with us. When we love God and others as we ought, we are motivated by such love to place a high value on meaningful relationships built on mutual love and trust. And when we are grateful for God’s gracious forgiveness (*forgiveness which enables us to be in a relationship with Him*) we are motivated to forgive others so that damaged relationships on the human level can be healed and broken relationships restored.

The **purpose of forgiveness** is to bring healing and restoration to a relationship that has been damaged or broken through unloving behavior by one or both parties. Therefore, forgiveness is one of the healing agents through which a sick, dying, or dead relationship must pass if it is to be restored to a state of health.

The **prerequisite for receiving forgiveness** is repentance, accompanied by an admission of wrongdoing, an apology, and a request to be forgiven. Repentance is a change of mind which results in a corresponding change of behavior. For example, where once you thought it right or justifiable to behave in selfish, uncaring, or unloving ways, you now believe it is wrong and so you set your mind on behaving in a caring and loving way.

Without repentance – as verified by a confession and an apology, and supported by a sustained change of behavior – there can be no relationship healing or relationship restoring forgiveness. We can give up our claim to repayment or punishment. We can give up our feelings of resentment and anger – and we ought. And we can reject any thought or desire for revenge. But we cannot restore the relationship until the offending party repents, and sustains a change of behavior. Otherwise, the relationship damaging behavior will continue – thus preventing healing and restoration.

However, when the offender repents, apologizes, and asks for forgiveness, it is time for the offended party to give forgiveness. Once forgiveness has been given, it is time for both parties to devote themselves to restoring the relationship. They do this by setting aside any unfriendliness that may have come between them and begin working at being friendly. They

do this by replacing whatever resentment, bitterness, animosity, ill-will, or hatred they had toward each other with sympathy, kindness, tenderness, patience, and love. Where they argued and fought or avoided each other, they now pursue an openness and honesty that feeds understanding and healing. Where there was distrust, they each open the door for trust to be restored. Instead of withdrawing from the relationship, they pursue it. Instead of separating, they build unity so love can bloom again. This is the “**restore the relationship**” part of forgiveness, and it takes both sides/parties to make it happen.

The point being made is that you cannot have a mutually meaningful, mutually loving, trust-based relationship with someone who has repeatedly pushed you away or hurt you or hurt those you love without remorse and repentance and a sustained change of behavior on their part.

However, when faced with someone who seems unwilling to change their relationship damaging ways, you can be honest and clear with them about their behavior without becoming ungodly, unloving, disrespectful, sarcastic, bitter, sinfully angry, hostile, or abusive.

But to remain loving and honest when forced to endure unwanted disappointment or pain, you must (1) make God your primary source of security, (2) make God’s love your primary source of love, (3) and make love itself the deciding factor in how you will think, speak, and behave. Then you must (1) guard your thoughts to prevent thinking the wrong way, (2) guard your tongue so that you do not speak in unloving, unkind, exaggerated, hurtful, or abusive ways, (3) and practice/write out ahead of time saying things in an honest and clear way so that when you are with the person you will speak in ways that tell the truth while keeping the door open for healing and the restoration of the relationship.

Now according to the definition of love, you can seek the good of everyone, be they friend or foe. However, seeking a person’s good is not equal to having a shared relationship of trust and love with that person. Seeking their good is simply the act of doing what is best for an individual or group in spite of their behavior toward you or others.

In this, God is our supreme example. Jesus states this truth this way.

*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matthew 5:43-45)*

One-sided love can promote and protect the good of others, including our enemies, but it cannot heal a damaged relationship or restore a broken one. Only repentance on the part of the offender and forgiveness on the part of the offended can create the environment necessary for reconciliation and the rebuilding of a meaningful, mutually loving, mutually trusting relationship. Therefore, the one forgiving must be **willing to risk** trusting again, and the one being forgiven must be **willing to change** so as to validate his worthiness to be trusted.

Forgiveness takes two – two sides working together in healing the damage done and restoring the relationship to one of mutual love and trust.

## STEPS OF FORGIVENESS

THE ONE FORGIVING	THE ONE BEING FORGIVEN
<p><b>STEP 1.</b> Choose to value the person and the relationship.</p>	<p><b>STEP 1.</b> Humbly accept the fact you have wronged another person.</p>
<p><b>STEP 2.</b> Go to the other person. Ask for a joint effort in resolving the conflict.</p>	<p><b>STEP 2.</b> Value the person and the relationship enough to make restitution and seek reconciliation.</p>
<p><b>STEP 3.</b> Explain how the wrong affected you. Ask the offender to explain his side. Restate what you hear until both agree on what is said. Listen for hidden fears and underlying concerns. Affirm your concern for the good of both and a restored relationship. Ask what you have done to contribute to the conflict.</p>	<p><b>STEP 3.</b> Admit the wrong you have done. Avoid defensiveness. Try to understand the other person's view of the conflict. Restate what you hear till both agree on what is said. Look for hidden fears and underlying concerns. Be kind but honest about the other person's part if he wronged you.</p>
<p><b>STEP 4.</b> Deal with wrongs done: a) work together for a resolution, b) agree on what each is to do in working out the resolution, c) establish a method for verifying progress, d) settle on a response to failure, e) lay the past to rest.</p>	<p><b>STEP 4.</b> Deal with wrongs done: a) repent and commit to change, b) seek solutions in a spirit of cooperation, c) pursue methods of verification and responses to failure that will build trust, d) accept forgiveness.</p>
<p><b>STEP 5.</b> Affirm your commitment to trust. Affirm your commitment to a shared relationship of love and trust. Ask if the other person shares these commitments.</p>	<p><b>STEP 5.</b> Affirm your commitment to re-establish trust. Acknowledge that trust must be earned. Affirm your commitment to a relationship built on mutual love and trust.</p>
<p><b>STEP 6.</b> Begin again to work on the relationship. Show good faith by pursuing the other person. Do not brood over the incident. Do not remind the other party of their past failure. Do not tell others. Do not allow anything related to this conflict to hinder the growth of the relationship in anyway. Ask for changes to the agreement if needed.</p>	<p><b>STEP 6.</b> Begin again to work on the relationship. Prove you want to change by making sincere efforts to change. Accept the reality of reputation lost. Give the other person time to grow in trusting you. Cooperate with the verification process. Do what you agreed on when failure occurs. Work at relating in healthy ways. Do not let anything get in the way of reconciliation. Ask for changes to the agreement if needed.</p>

## AN APPEASEMENT

**Offers a self-demeaning apology**, grovels.

**Degrades self** in an attempt to make self look bad so offended party will show pity or mercy.

**Makes unclear appeal** to pity and mercy.

### **Is asking for:**

1) Escape from consequences or punishment for wrongs done.

2) Escape from humiliation for wrong choices made.

### **Seeks acceptance.**

Does not wish to take responsibility for wrongs done, but does want offended party to accept them as if they had done no wrong.

## AN ACCOUNT

**Offers a full account of why** he did what was done. This comes in the form of a justification or an excuse.

**Uses disclaimers.** Asks to be recognized as generally being a good person.

**Spreads the blame** beyond self as if what was done would not have been done if the other party had not done what they did or circumstances were not what they were.

### **Is asking for:**

1) The other party to see the extenuating circumstances or their own part in the wrong doing.

2) The other party to be reasonable and tolerant since the explanation given shows the accused is neither solely nor mostly to blame.

### **Seeks exoneration.**

Denies responsibility; side-steps having to be accountable for what was done; excuses self due to extenuating circumstances.

## AN APOLOGY

**Offers no defense or excuse.** Simply admits wrong done.

**Shows true sorrow** and pledges to work on keeping wrong from recurring in the future (*to change*).

**Adds nothing** to the apology.

### **Is asking for:**

1) Forgiveness for the wrong done. Acknowledges that what was done was wrong, unwarranted, and inexcusable.

2) Healing of the relationship to a restored state of mutual love and trust.

### **Seeks reconciliation.**

Takes authentic, obvious responsibility for the wrong done without any explanation or justification or personal defense. Accepts the consequences.

## THE SIX A's OF CONFESSION

1. **ADDRESS EVERYONE INVOLVED:** Confess to each person who has been affected by your wrongdoing.
  2. **AVOID IFs, BUTS, AND MAYBES:** Consciously delete words that dilute your confession, excuse your conduct, or shift the blame to others.
  3. **ADMIT SPECIFICALLY WHAT YOU DID WRONG:** Don't hide behind vague generalities. Specifically identify your wrong **attitudes** (*pride, selfishness, greed, envy, bitterness, ingratitude, stubbornness, etc.*) and **actions**. Then admit that what you did was wrong and that you have no excuse for what you did.
  4. **APOLOGIZE:** Acknowledge and express sorrow for the fact that your actions hurt the other person.
  5. **ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES:** Accept full responsibility for what you have done. This may require fulfilling a promise, making restitution, or losing benefits or privileges.
  6. **ASK FOR FORGIVENESS:** Finally, ask the person you wronged to forgive you, and if necessary, allow time for that person to work through his or her feelings.
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## A TWO EXAMPLES OF AN APOLOGY

### A BREACH OF PUBLIC TRUST

Investigative reporters discovered that a state official had misused his authority to secure a job for a woman he was dating. At first he denied any wrongdoing. The governor's office looked into the matter, however, and soon the evidence against him was overwhelming. In a last-ditch effort to save his job, the man made the following public statement:

"It is possible that I sent a wrong signal. If I did and I made a mistake, then I am sorry."

Neither the public nor the governor was impressed by this feeble admission. As a result, this man lost a position that he might have held for years to come.

### COMING CLEAN – Track star Marion Jones repents and retires.

Marion Jones issued a tearful statement after she pleaded guilty in federal court October 5<sup>th</sup>, to lying to federal investigators when she denied using performance-enhancing drugs. By Monday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, she had returned five medals won in the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 and agreed to forfeit other awards and prize money dating back to the time when she now admits she was using "THE CLEAR," a performance-enhancing steroid. Besides two gold and three bronze medals, the forfeiture is likely to be in the millions of dollars.

"Making these false statements to federal agents was an incredibly stupid thing for me to do, and I am responsible fully for my actions," a tearful Jones, said outside U.S. District Court in White Plains, N.Y. "I have no one to blame but myself for what I've done."

She went on to say, "To fans, fellow athletes, friends, and family, I want you to know that I have been dishonest, and you have the right to be angry with me. . . . I have let you down. I have let my country down. And I have let myself down. I recognize that by saying that I'm deeply sorry, it might not be enough and sufficient to address the pain and the hurt that I have caused you. Therefore, I want to ask for your forgiveness for my actions, and I hope that you

can find it in your heart to forgive me.” She concluded: “I have asked Almighty God for my forgiveness. Having said this and because of my actions, I am retiring from the sport of track and field, a sport that I deeply love.”

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## **FORGIVENESS AS SPOKEN OF IN THE SCRIPTURES**

### **PSALM 103:8-14**

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive with us; nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.

According to these verses, what is God's attitude toward us when we sin? \_\_\_\_\_

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What should our attitude be toward those who sin against us? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **LUKE 17:3-4**

“Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke (*confront*) him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

What does God Word say about talking to those near and/or dear to us when they sin against us or someone we know? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Galatians 6:1**

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

What does God’s Word say about our attitude and the way we confront \_\_\_\_\_

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**PROVERBS 24:17-18**

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; lest the Lord see it and be displeased and turn away His anger from that enemy for his offenses against you.

**PROVERBS 24:29a**

Do not say, "Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me...."

**ROMANS 12: 17-21**

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 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. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**EPHESIANS 4:31-32**

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

**COLOSSIANS 3:12-14**

And 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. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

These verses list attitudes, feelings, and actions that hinder forgiveness and damage relationships. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_

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These verses list attitudes, feelings, and actions that encourage us to forgive and restore relationships. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_

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**MATTHEW 6:14-15**

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

**MATTHEW 18:21-35**

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. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents (*equivalent to \$10,000,000.00*). But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii (\$18); and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall my heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

**MARK 11:25-26**

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."

## FOOLISH SOLUTIONS TO CONFLICT

Foolish solutions to conflict often bring immediate relief from what we do not like or want to experience in relation to the conflict itself or the person with whom we are in conflict. But they also cause relationships to become shallow, damaged, and ultimately broken. Examples of sinful, foolish, and even irrational solutions to conflict are:

### CHOOSING TO AGGRESSIVELY CONTROL/MANIPULATE OTHERS

by becoming hostile and abusive or critical and demanding

This kind of response is equal to grabbing the biggest stick possible and beating the other person into submission. When we are this intent on making the other person do what we want, or stop doing what we don't want, our goal is selfish control, not meaningful relationship. Selfish control is based on the belief that personal happiness or a personal sense of well-being are needs we must satisfy to feel good about life, and that controlling others is the most reliable way to satisfy our sense of need. If and when we use these kinds of methods, it is because we believe unresolved conflict or conflict resolved contrary to our wishes is a threat to our sense of well-being. Therefore, we keep conflict at a minimum and feelings of personal happiness at a maximum by controlling others.

This method may make people do what we want, but it also makes them feel disrespected, disregarded, used, and unloved – which results in them pulling away so that we lose out on a relationship built on **mutual** love and trust.

### CHOOSING TO PASSIVELY SUBMIT TO OTHERS

for the sake of a peace which frees us from conflict

True love and true peace only exist where both sides work together for the common good. Therefore, neither love nor peace can be gained by using appeasement or peace-keeping compliance. When we use appeasement and/or peace-keeping compliance (*passive submission*) to avoid conflict and maintain a peaceful environment, we do so for our own sake and not for the sake of the other person or the relationship or love or true peace.

In other words, the appeaser is acting just as selfishly as the aggressive controller and manipulator. The passive person's methods of dealing with conflict are chosen on the basis of maintaining a personal sense of well-being and a peaceful environment – with little or no regard for the good of the other person or having a relationship built on mutual love and trust.

For example, there is no peace in appeasement. Appeasement is the act of giving the aggressor what he wants in the hope of preventing turmoil, ill-will, or anger – or in other words, conflict between the aggressor and appeaser. This method can keep the one who fears conflict and the strong words and emotions often associated with conflict from experiencing such discomforts. Yet the best a relationship can be under these conditions is shallow, because the appeaser will feel used and the aggressor will feel defrauded – leaving both feeling unloved and distrusted.

## **CHOOSING TO DISTANCE OURSELVES FROM OTHERS**

for the sake of self-protection

It is natural and right to protect ourselves from people who are mistreating us in some way. However, it is selfish to protect ourselves in a way that elevates our own sense of well-being over (1) the health of the relationship, (2) the good of the person mistreating us, (3) and the good of anyone else the offending party may adversely affect with his offensive behavior (*currently or in the future*).

We often think that those who hurt us are intrinsically bad (*an inherent evil flaw in one's nature*). Therefore, keeping our distance is our way of keeping the relationship shallow and casual. It is our way of putting a buffer between ourselves and those who will certainly hurt us again because of their character flaw. Though distance shields us from the recurring threat of pain, it also prevents us from growing in mental, emotional, and spiritual maturity, and from resolving our differences and restoring the relationship to a healthy condition.

## **CHOOSING TO LIVE WITHOUT PEOPLE WHO OFFEND US**

by pushing them away or ignoring them or avoiding them

When we have been hurt by someone and we do not want to risk being hurt again, the quickest and easiest solution is to put ourselves out of reach of the person causing our pain. The best way to put ourselves out of reach is to drive them away, or stay away from them. Alienation dramatically reduces the risk of being hurt again, but it also drastically reduces the possibility of regaining meaningful relationship with them. While this method protects us from those who hurt us, it shows we are more concerned about our happiness and well-being than keeping the door open to restoring a relationship with them.

## **CHOOSING TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS BEHAVIOR**

for the sake of supposed peace, approval and acceptance, and an easier life

Some of us, and especially those who are passive, try to shield others from the consequences of their behavior. To accomplish this, we try to make them think everything is all right between us, or between them and others, when it isn't. Or we try to play their part by saying and doing things they ought to say or do in an effort to make them look better than they are.

Taking responsibility for others in this way is our attempt to keep control of a situation or a person in order to minimize the harm they do to us and others. And this is especially true in relation to approval and acceptance for both of us. In other words, from fear of having to live with the natural consequences of their behavior, we scurry around explaining or defending their behavior and attempting to patch up the damaged relationships they leave in their wake.

This method makes us look and feel like we are noble and loving. What a lie. When taking responsibility for others, we are just as selfish as the person for whom we're taking responsibility. In other words, we do this because we care more about ourselves than we care about the good of the other person. And though this method can help us limit the destructive effects of another

person's selfish choices and behavior, it makes it easier for them to continue their bad behavior, it blunts the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in their life, it works against looking to God as our supreme source of security, and it prevents us from gaining a relationship of mutual love and trust with them.

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## IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF A RESOLUTION

**It is important** that both parties feel satisfied with the process used to achieve resolution. To feel satisfied, they must believe the process was fair. They must believe they had sufficient opportunity to tell their side of the story and express their concerns. They must believe they were heard and that their basic rights were protected. A resolution is only lasting when both parties are satisfied with it. Work to make the process satisfactory to everyone involved, for this is vital to promoting a lasting resolution.

**It is important** that both parties feel satisfied with the terms of the resolution. To feel satisfied, they must believe the terms are reasonable. If the terms seem excessive or too hard to fulfill, or are agreed to under pressure, they will be abandoned when supporting them is no longer convenient or beneficial. A resolution will last when both parties are satisfied with it. Make sure the terms are satisfactory to each party involved to help promote a lasting resolution.

**It is important** that both parties agree on a system for verifying the progress toward fulfillment of the resolution. When there is no system of verification, the commitment to change or do certain agreed on things can be forgotten or neglected. This sets the stage for cycling through the conflict again and again. Progress toward the fulfillment of a resolution ought to be verified on a regular basis. When progress is steady and verifiable, both parties will be satisfied, and the resolution will last.

**It is important** that both parties agree on what will be done if and when failure to fulfill the resolution occurs. If a process for handling failure is agreed on in advance, its implementation will ensure a satisfactory response to failure when it occurs. When failure occurs, people often say, "**See, nothing has changed!**" What they mean to say is, "Resolving this conflict and restoring our relationship is hopeless because you won't do your part!" When one party feels the other is not taking his part of the resolution seriously, the resolution will fall apart. To make a resolution last, failure must be dealt with openly and honestly. The best way to help that happen is to agree on the process before failure occurs.

**It is important** that both parties feel emotionally satisfied with the resolution. This means feeling forgiven over past failures or wrongs done. It means feeling confident the wrongdoers are committed to change. It means feeling accepted and respected, feeling free to be spontaneous and open instead of guarded and closed, and feeling that the value of the relationship is what brought the conflicting parties back together. When both parties are emotionally satisfied, the resolution will last.

## **FIVE WAYS TO HELP INCREASE COOPERATION**

- 1. MAKE IT CLEAR YOU CARE ABOUT THE GOOD OF THE OTHER PERSON:** If one or both parties do not value the well-being of the other, cooperation is diminished – and that affects the outcome. If concern for the good of the other is not clearly expressed and even repeated, the other person will likely assume their good is not one of your priorities. As each party shows concern for the well-being of the other, cooperation is increased, the probability of a mutually satisfying outcome is increased, and the restoration of the relationship to a healthy condition is increased.
- 2. DISCUSS THE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES.** Consider what will happen, long-term, if things stay the same and if they change. Consider carefully how the agreed on change will affect both parties in the immediate future and in years to come.
- 3. GO THE EXTRA MILE IN SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND THE OTHER PERSON'S SIDE OF THE STORY:** Listen, listen, listen. Ask non-condemning investigative questions, and listen some more. Show that you want to understand the other person, that you want to see the conflict from their point of view, that you want to acknowledge the truth in their complaints against you, that you want to be corrected, that you want to rework a resolution that is not producing the desired results, and that you want to see the good in the other person along with their wrong and/or hurtful behavior. This builds trust, which in turn builds cooperation, which in turn brings a better outcome for both of you.
- 4. CHANGE THE BENEFITS GAINED:** Be creative in looking for benefits that promote the best outcome for both parties, and therefore the strongest commitment possible to the resolution of the conflict, the fulfillment of the agreed on resolution, and the restoration of the relationship.
- 5. BECOME MORE AWARE OF WHO YOU ARE AND HOW YOU ARE AFFECTING OTHERS:** Make an honest effort to see your selfish, hurtful, relationship damaging ways for the purpose of better loving and caring for those around you. Ask God, other family members, friends, co-workers, and those in conflict with you to tell you what you ought to change in order to be a more loving, caring co-worker, friend, parent, or spouse. Often times, changing ourselves gives those around us more reason to trust us and want to work out their differences with us.

## IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO WHEN RESOLVING CONFLICT

- 1. GO TO THE OTHER PARTY:** Resolving conflict requires dealing with the person you are in conflict with. Go to that person and ask him to join you in identifying your differences, resolving the conflict, and restoring the relationship. If you do not go to the other party, you cannot resolve the conflict or restore the relationship. (*Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-18*)
- 2. COOL DOWN THE EMOTIONS:** Separate the problem from the people so that you attack the problem, not the person. It is common to fear the resolution process or feel unloved when confronted or criticized. However, these feelings come from being more concerned about one's sense of well-being, acceptance, approval, security, or happiness than about the good of all involved and the relationship. This kind of self-focus promotes defensive arguing in response to confrontation, justification or a denial of wrongdoing in response to being accused, counter-criticism when criticized, hostility, withdrawal, and alienation. Humility, a commitment to love, and valuing meaningful relationships are necessary ingredients when it comes to handling conflict in a way that seeks the good of all involved. (*Ephesians 4:26-27; Colossians 3:12-14*)
- 3. GUARD AGAINST ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING:** Reject thoughts like, "I must win or else," "If he gets his way on this, I've lost everything," "If she thinks I am this bad, she must not love me," "Real friends accept friends the way they are," "We're never going to resolve this issue, so why try," "Before I do \_\_\_\_\_, she must \_\_\_\_\_."
- 4. DO NOT FIGHT OVER NUMBERS:** Fighting over numbers turns a discussion into an argument. Rather than focusing on how many times it was or wasn't done, focus on whether it was or wasn't done enough times to cause a problem (*done too often or not enough*). To accomplish this focus say, "It happened too often," or "You haven't done it enough."
- 5. SEE THE CONFLICT AS A JOINT PROBLEM:** It is rare that conflict is one sided, yet even if it is, work together to resolve the issue and restore the relationship.
- 6. IDENTIFY THE REAL ISSUE:** There is the stated issue, then there is the underlying interests. The underlying interests are made up of concerns, fears, expectations, needs, desires, and hopes. If we are to identify and understand the real issue, we must try to identify and understand what is not being said yet is deeply felt by each person involved in the dispute. If the underlying interests are not met, the issue will not be resolved in a way that rebuilds trust and restores the relationship.
- 7. INVESTIGATE:** Avoid the trap of thinking you know everything about the conflict. Ask questions, verify or clarify all assumptions, get the other person's side of the story, find out how your behavior has affected them. Do your best to make sure no one is being misquoted, misinterpreted, or misunderstood.

8. **STICK TO THE ISSUE:** Avoid getting sidetracked from the issue by arguments over numbers (*You've done it a hundred times!*), attacks on the person (*You're really dumb if you think that!*), dredging up the past (*Remember when you did...?*), and bringing up additional unresolved issues (*Well, you also...!*). Be sensitive to when the focus is changing and steer the discussion back to the issue. **USE PENCIL AND PAPER!** If other issues are mentioned that need to be resolved, write them down and return to them another time.
9. **WORK THROUGH FORGIVENESS:** Forgiveness is essential to conflict resolution and relationship restoration. Do not short-change this part of the process. Freely offer it and graciously receive it. (*NOTE: Ephesians 4:32*)
10. **SHOW CONCERN FOR THE COMMON GOOD:** Show that you care about the good of everyone involved in the conflict – the other party and yourself. If you show by your attitude and words that you care about the good of the other party, you earn the right to ask them to do the same for you. (*NOTE: Romans 13:10*)
11. **POINT TO THE AREAS OF AGREEMENT:** Establishing the fact that both parties agree on something is crucial to working together to find solutions that will resolve the conflict. These areas of agreement provide a basis for working on areas of disagreement.
12. **BE IMAGINATIVE IN LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS:** Brainstorm ideas. List the ideas. After listing the ideas, evaluate them. Pick the ones that are realistic, protect and promote the good of both, and have the best chance of being implemented by both parties. Select a solution that both parties can agree to, own as their own, and live up to.
13. **AGREE ON A METHOD OF VERIFYING PROGRESS:** Do not leave the implementation of your resolution to chance. Establish a method for meeting on a regular basis – for two or more months – to review progress and adjust the agreement if necessary. This will help the resolution accomplish its intended purpose of restoring mutual love and trust.
14. **AGREE ON A METHOD FOR DEALING WITH FAILURE:** Getting back on track after falling off is important to the restoration of trust and the relationship. Agree in advance how you will handle failure if and when it occurs.
15. **FOCUS ON THE FUTURE AND RESTORING TRUST:** It is too easy to focus on the past, the pain, and the evil of the other person. This will do nothing to restore or strengthen a relationship. If the goal of conflict resolution is to protect and promote relationships, then focus on what will do that instead of what has happened. Put the past behind you and find joy and peace in living and loving.
16. **SEEK THE HELP OF A NEUTRAL PARTY WHEN NECESSARY:** Conflict has the ability to increase our emotions and decrease our sensibleness. A neutral party can provide the atmosphere and help the parties courteously and sensibly resolving the conflict. Therefore, seek good help when needed.

## DEALING WITH SOMEONE

who believes you have hurt or wronged them in some way  
when you are innocent

The first and foremost point to make here is that it is exceedingly rare for a conflict or a perceived wrong to be truly one sided. In other words, when a wrong or hurt has been perceived by one party, it is rare that the supposed offending party is completely innocent. However, since that can, on rare occasions, be the case, consider the following.

Such qualities as humility, gentleness, patience, compassion, the absence of defensiveness, the willingness to hear the other person's side of the story, and everything else learned so far in this study are required when dealing with someone who believes you have wronged them in some way, when in fact, you are innocent.

The strongest possible reason to behave in a humble, gentle, patient, compassionate way when dealing with someone who thinks you have wronged them when you haven't is because this is the way God deals with us.

You see, we have put God in this position more than once, and it is possible we will put Him in it again – to our shame. But, you say, how have we put God in this position? We have put God in this position by being distrustful of Him, critical of what He is doing, complaining about what He isn't doing, and on occasion, being angry with Him, while He – whom we are criticizing for treating us poorly or for doing us wrong – is the innocent party.

And yet, though falsely accused of evils that have never even entered His mind, God does not pull away from us, or abandon us – so as to leave us totally on our own, and He does not withhold the necessities of life from us – such as sunshine and rain, a season for planting and a season for harvest. And beyond that, because God is compassionate and merciful in spite our mistreatment of Him, He does not destroy us for criticizing Him or being angry with Him when He has done nothing wrong.

Now, if you are grateful that God does not respond in anger or vindictiveness or by pulling away and leaving you totally on your own when you think and speak as if He is a bad god, then it is hypocritical and unloving to treat those who falsely accuse you in a way other than the way God treats you. Therefore, God's dealings with you provide the strongest possible reason to behave in a humble, gentle, patient, and compassionate way when dealing with someone who thinks you have wronged them – when you haven't.

There are three primary reasons someone may be offended or hurt or angered by something you have done or didn't do when they have no justifiable reason to be offended or hurt or angry. The **first primary reason** for someone being offended or hurt or angered without just cause is that they have encountered resistance from you to their unloving, uncaring, unkind, or otherwise wrong behavior, or they are being asked to do what they ought to do or have agreed to do, but don't want to do and haven't yet done.

For example, a child may take offense at being corrected or told he cannot do something he wants to do. In the same way, adults are known to take offense or think they are being treated unjustly, or get defensive and angry when corrected, or told they cannot do what they want to do, or asked to do what they ought to do but don't want to do.

Does that mean the person doing the correcting or telling or asking has done something wrong? NO! And yet, an offense has been taken.

The **second primary reason** for someone being offended or hurt or angered without just cause is that they have a fear that is so strong it compels them to be excessively sensitive to anything – be it words, looks, inferences, or behavior – that raises their fear to a level that makes them feel unsafe.

For example, if someone's sense of security is based on having approval and acceptance from those around them, then in their neediness for approval and acceptance they become excessively sensitive so as to notice even a look or tone of voice that implies unhappiness with them, or disapproval, or criticism, or outright rejection. And when they believe they have discerned such an inference, even though wrongly interpreted, they go away hurt or feeling unloved even though there is no justifiable reason to feel that way.

A **third primary reason** for someone being offended or hurt or angered without just cause is the belief that their views and opinions are right, and anyone who disagrees with them must be inherently bad – and therefore worthy of being vilified. So naturally, they take offense when a conversation or debate is ended and the other party still disagrees with them and is still willing to oppose their view or position. Two well-known topics that commonly expose this third reason are politics and religion.

So what are we supposed to do in such cases? The first and foremost thing we are to do is to follow God's model of dealing with us when we accuse Him of failing us when He hasn't.

The next thing we ought to do is make sure our attitude and mindset are operating within the boundaries of godliness. To do this, we must guard our thoughts – and especially our swirling, repetitive thoughts of how unfair it is to be falsely accused or misunderstood, and how bad the other person is for assuming the worst of us when we are innocent.

If you are new at dealing with these kinds of situations, then you ought to carefully think out how you will approach the person who is unjustly offended, what you will say to begin the conversation, and how you hope to behave from start to finish. And if you are to do this within the boundaries of godliness, then you must take whatever steps are needed to remain humble and calm – before, during, and after dealing with the person.

Again, if you are new at dealing with these kinds of situations, it is wise, and even necessary to write out your explanation or your side of the story so that you can say it without attacking, criticizing, putting down – even in a joking way, or otherwise giving the other person a legitimate reason to discount your efforts and continue feeling justified in having taken an offense.

Be on guard because any conversation of this sort can easily be derailed through an unwise choice of words or a tone of voice that implies they are bad, foolish, or stupid for having come to their wrong conclusion – especially when addressing those parts of their misunderstanding where you feel they have no excuse for concluding you wronged them.

Beyond your words and tone of voice, facial expressions can reinforce your disapproval, or dismay, or a “how could you conclude such a thing” message. Therefore, it is important to go into such a conversation thoughtful of what you are saying with your face and the tone of your voice, because a few wrong looks and an occasional defensive or condemning tone can make it harder for the other person to believe you.

It is important to treat the person with respect, with humility, and with compassion, regardless of their attitude, choice of words, tone of voice, accusations, or distrust of you and your side of the story.

Upon meeting with the person, there is wisdom in beginning with a few pleasantries before jumping into the subject at hand. Once you move to dealing with the issue between you, ask them to tell you their side of the story so that you can hear from them how hurt they are and how they came to believe you offended or hurt them in some way.

Listening in this setting means listening until they are done telling their side of the story. Do not interrupt! And especially do not interrupt to correct a detail or give an explanation.

If you want to correct a particular part of their perception of what happened or deal with a specific detail in their story, write it down so you can remember what it was and come back to it after they finish telling their story. But again, don’t interrupt. Listen to the end.

Also, listening means listening to understand their side of the story and their reasons for concluding what they did. Do not listen to prepare your defense or to argue back or to prove how wrong they are. **Listen to understand.** Then when you believe you understand **the how and why** of their conclusion that you offended or hurt them, you can begin deciding what to say in response.

Finally, if in listening you hear **anything** that implicates you, take full responsibility for it – by admitting what you did was wrong, and by admitting you have no excuse, and by acknowledging you understand how it hurt or offended them, and by asking for forgiveness.

After they tell you their side of the story, ask if they want to hear your side. In asking, you are giving them the freedom to choose what they want, that is, to choose whether they want to hold on to the offense or open the door to resolving the issue and bring about healing to the relationship.

When a person is forced to hear your side of the story, they may acknowledge wrongdoing, but they won’t own their part, and they won’t allow your side of the story to change their mind about the issue or about you. It is only when we freely choose to deal with a conflict in a manner

that seeks to right the wrongs, promote reconciliation, and restore the relationship that we actually and sincerely move in that direction.

When telling your side of the story, try to do it in a way that helps the other person hear what you are saying. Therefore, avoid using words or labels that offend them or give them a reason to discredit you as a person and therefore discredit your explanation.

Finally, if you cannot resolve the difference, don't give up. Seek outside counsel for yourself, and if the other side will agree, look for a third party who can help both of you work the problem out in a way that seeks the good of both. But when selecting a third party, select someone both sides trust. To do otherwise is to unnecessarily bring suspicion over the fairness of the process into the process, which in turn will decrease the probability of resolving the difference in a mutually agreeable way.

1 Corinthians 10:31b, "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

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## THE CARING COMMUNITY AND CONFLICT

Conflict resolution within a community is the glue that holds caring communities together.

Every community is only days away from damaged or broken relationships. First, differences arise. Second, those involved pick selfish solutions so that the resolution of those differences is mishandled. Third, trust is eroded. Fourth, forgiveness is denied. Fifth, acceptance is withdrawn. Sixth, damaged or broken relationships result and the group splinters.

Seldom are damaged and broken relationships the fault of one person alone. When both parties are part of a community, it means the community did too little to promote or improve the process of conflict resolution and reconciliation. It also means the community is doing nothing about the resulting alienation. This puts the community at equal fault with the conflicting parties for the damaged or broken relationship.

Yet a healthy, caring community is one of the best places for resolving conflict and healing broken relationships. A caring community can provide the necessary support for the hard task of working through conflict, coming to forgiveness, and rebuilding trust. It can ensure that the greatest need – **acceptance and love** – is met for all involved. Indeed, in the caring community, relationships of mutual love and trust are not only nurtured, they are the standard.

Caring communities don't just happen, they are developed through planned, careful, and perpetual work. The following six things are common attitudes and actions of a caring community.

1. **TIME FOR EACH OTHER:** being available when needed and making time to come together to nurture the relationships that exist.

2. **OPEN HONESTY WITH EACH OTHER:** being open and honest about ourselves and about the one to whom we are talking. This requires an atmosphere where it is safe to say what we feel and what we think needs to be said. It also means having an atmosphere where it is safe to ask for limits on what others do or say to us, for us, and with us. It means being free to state our values and live by them when they are consistent with the good of the community. It means being free to confront and to be confronted as a show of love and concern for one another.
3. **ACCEPTANCE OF EACH OTHER:** so that everyone in the community is keenly aware that they are valued and loved by everyone else in the community. Numbers can make it impractical for each person in the community to have a meaningful relationship with every other person in the community. Yet the attitude and behavior of the community ought to clearly say that if this were possible it would be so. When this attitude prevails, the community makes certain each member knows they will receive the support, understanding, and help needed when facing conflict. The community works at being sensitive to each other's pain, anger, or hurt when offended. The community strives to give each member affection and affirmation. These are the things that make each member feel accepted. And when each member feels accepted, they are better able to face and properly deal with whatever conflict enters their lives.
4. **REACHING OUT TO THOSE WHO ARE HURTING OR WITHDRAWING:** because the need for being loved and accepted is greatest when times are hardest, stress is strongest, frustration levels are highest, hurt is deepest, rejection is obvious, and running seems the only way out. Turning away from people when they are in pain, even if they are acting in ways that make it difficult to be around them is not what caring communities do for each other. The caring community knows how discouraging it is to endure hardship alone and how easy it is for discouraged people to become defeated people. Because they love, they don't want any of their members to give in to discouragement and end up defeated.
5. **ENCOURAGING RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT AND RESTORATION OF RELATIONSHIP:** so that everyone in the community knows that relationships are among those things that are of highest priority to the community. The caring community wants it to be known that division and alienation are unacceptable. Their commitment to each other drives them to work out their relationships with each other so that love and trust remain strong. They know that the immediate good of the community and the long-term existence of the community depends on this. So they are eager to help those in a conflict situation to work through their conflict and restore the relationship.
6. **AFFIRMING THE RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT AND EXPRESSING JOY OVER EVERY RESTORED RELATIONSHIP:** this reinforces the value of conflict resolution, the unity of the community, and the practice of resolving differences and working through conflict as individuals with the help and support of the community.