



PERFECTLY FLAWED
LEADERSHIP

BIBLICAL AND PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable part of human relationships, arising in families, workplaces, churches, and communities. While conflict itself is not inherently sinful, how we respond to it reveals the condition of our hearts and our commitment to living peaceably with others. Scripture provides profound wisdom for navigating disagreements in ways that honor God, restore relationships, and build unity. This document explores both biblical foundations and practical applications for resolving conflicts in a Christ-centered manner.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Nature of Conflict

Conflict often stems from unmet desires, pride, misunderstanding, or sin. James 4:1-2 asks, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" Understanding the root causes of conflict helps us address issues at their source rather than merely treating symptoms.

God's Heart for Peace and Reconciliation

Scripture consistently emphasizes God's desire for His people to live in harmony. Romans 12:18 instructs believers, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Jesus pronounced a blessing on peacemakers, calling them children of God (Matthew 5:9). The pursuit of peace is not optional but central to Christian character.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Second Corinthians 5:18-19 reveals that God has given believers the ministry of reconciliation. As those who have been reconciled to God through Christ, we are called to be agents of reconciliation in our relationships with others. This calling reflects God's character and the transformative power of the gospel.

CORE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Examine Your Own Heart First

Jesus taught in Matthew 7:3-5 to first remove the plank from your own eye before attempting to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Self-examination is the essential starting point for conflict resolution. This requires honest assessment of our own motives, attitudes, and contributions to the conflict.

Practical Application:

- Ask yourself: "How have I contributed to this conflict?"
- Confess your own sin and shortcomings to God before confronting others
- Approach the situation with humility, recognizing your own fallibility
- Pray for God to reveal any blind spots in your perspective

2. Go Directly to the Person

Matthew 18:15 provides clear instruction: "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you." This principle protects relationships from gossip and gives the other person the dignity of hearing concerns directly.

Practical Application:

- Resist the temptation to vent to third parties
- Avoid passive-aggressive behavior or silent treatment
- Schedule a private conversation at an appropriate time
- Approach the person face-to-face when possible, rather than through text or email
- Begin the conversation with care and respect

3. Speak the Truth in Love

Ephesians 4:15 calls believers to speak the truth in love. This balance is critical—truth without love becomes harsh and damaging, while love without truth enables sin and avoids necessary confrontation.

Practical Application:

- Use "I" statements to express how you've been affected ("I felt hurt when...")
- Be specific about behaviors or actions rather than attacking character
- Maintain a gentle tone and respectful language
- Express genuine care for the relationship and the other person's well-being
- Avoid exaggeration, sarcasm, or inflammatory language

4. Listen with Humility

Proverbs 18:13 warns, "To answer before listening—that is folly and shame." James 1:19 encourages believers to be "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." Genuine listening demonstrates respect and often reveals information that changes our perspective.

Practical Application:

- Give the other person your full attention without interrupting
- Ask clarifying questions to ensure you understand their perspective
- Reflect back what you've heard to confirm understanding
- Be open to the possibility that you may be wrong or have incomplete information
- Pay attention to emotions behind the words, not just the content

5. Pursue Understanding Over Being Right

Philippians 2:3-4 instructs believers to "value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." The goal in conflict resolution is not victory but understanding and reconciliation.

Practical Application:

- Genuinely seek to understand the other person's perspective and feelings
- Ask questions like "Help me understand why this is important to you"
- Look for common ground and shared values
- Be willing to acknowledge valid points the other person makes
- Remember that both people can have legitimate concerns even if they differ

6. Be Quick to Forgive

Colossians 3:13 commands believers to "forgive as the Lord forgave you." Unforgiveness breeds bitterness and prevents healing. Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35) illustrates the seriousness of withholding forgiveness when we ourselves have been forgiven so much.

Practical Application:

- Extend forgiveness even when the other person doesn't fully apologize
- Recognize that forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling
- Understand that forgiving doesn't mean forgetting or eliminating consequences
- Release the desire for revenge or retaliation to God
- Be patient with yourself in the process of emotional healing

7. Seek Wise Counsel When Needed

Proverbs 15:22 states, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." When conflicts are complex or emotionally charged, seeking godly counsel provides perspective and wisdom.

Practical Application:

- Involve a mature, impartial third party if direct conversation doesn't resolve the issue
- Seek counsel from spiritually mature believers, church leaders, or professional counselors
- Follow the Matthew 18:16 principle of bringing witnesses if necessary
- Be willing to submit to church leadership or mediation when appropriate
- Choose counselors who will speak truth rather than simply validate your perspective

8. Let Go of Grudges and Bitterness

Hebrews 12:15 warns against allowing any "bitter root" to grow up and cause trouble. Ephesians 4:31-32 calls believers to put away bitterness, rage, and anger, replacing them with kindness and compassion.

Practical Application:

- Regularly bring resentful thoughts to God in prayer
- Refuse to rehearse the offense repeatedly in your mind
- Practice gratitude for God's forgiveness of your own sins
- Bless those who have wronged you through prayer
- Focus on present and future rather than dwelling on past hurts

9. Be Willing to Overlook Minor Offenses

Proverbs 19:11 teaches, "A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense." Not every slight requires confrontation. Sometimes love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

Practical Application:

- Distinguish between patterns of behavior and isolated incidents
- Ask yourself if the issue will matter in a week, month, or year
- Consider whether the offense was intentional or unintentional

- Recognize that everyone has bad days and makes mistakes
- Reserve confrontation for matters that truly affect the relationship or involve sin

10. Maintain a Soft Heart

Ephesians 4:26-27 warns, "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." Maintaining a tender heart prevents conflicts from escalating and festering.

Practical Application:

- Address issues promptly rather than letting them accumulate
- Don't use the silent treatment as a weapon
- Be approachable and willing to discuss concerns
- Recognize when you're becoming defensive and adjust your attitude
- Cultivate humility and gentleness as character traits

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Step 1: Prepare Your Heart

Before initiating a difficult conversation, spend time in prayer. Ask God to search your heart, reveal your own sin, and give you wisdom, grace, and the right words. Examine your motives to ensure you're seeking reconciliation, not just vindication.

Step 2: Choose the Right Time and Place

Select a private setting where both parties can speak freely without distractions or time pressure. Avoid discussing sensitive matters when either person is tired, hungry, or emotionally overwhelmed. Ask if it's a good time rather than ambushing someone.

Step 3: Begin with Affirmation

Start the conversation by expressing your care for the relationship and your desire to resolve the issue. Acknowledge positive aspects of the relationship or the person. This sets a constructive tone and reminds both parties of their shared connection.

Step 4: Clearly State the Issue

Describe the specific behavior or situation that's causing concern without attacking the person's character. Use concrete examples rather than generalizations. Focus on observable actions and their impact rather than assumptions about motives.

Step 5: Listen Actively and Empathetically

After expressing your perspective, invite the other person to share theirs. Listen without formulating your defense while they're speaking. Ask questions to ensure you understand fully. Validate their feelings even if you disagree with their conclusions.

Step 6: Acknowledge Your Contribution

Take responsibility for any ways you've contributed to the conflict. Offer a genuine apology for your part without justifying your actions or immediately pointing to the other person's faults.

Step 7: Work Toward Resolution Together

Collaborate on finding a solution rather than imposing demands. Brainstorm options together. Be willing to compromise on preferences while standing firm on principles. Focus on future behavior rather than past failures.

Step 8: Agree on Concrete Next Steps

Establish clear expectations and commitments moving forward. Make specific agreements about how you'll interact differently. Set a follow-up time to evaluate progress if appropriate.

Step 9: Pray Together

If both parties are believers, conclude by praying together. This acknowledges God's presence in the process and invites His continued work in the relationship.

Step 10: Follow Through

Honor the commitments you've made. If you said you'd change certain behaviors, do so. If you promised forgiveness, don't bring up the offense again. Rebuild trust through consistent, reliable action.

WHEN RESOLUTION SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE

Despite our best efforts, some conflicts remain unresolved. Romans 12:18 acknowledges this reality with the phrase "as far as it depends on you." We cannot control others' responses, but we can control our own attitudes and actions.

Entrust the Situation to God

First Peter 2:23 describes how Jesus, "when they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." When relationships remain broken despite our efforts, we must release the outcome to God.

Maintain Personal Integrity

Continue to treat the other person with respect and kindness even if they don't reciprocate. Refuse to gossip or slander. Pray for them genuinely. Your witness and character matter more than winning the conflict.

Set Appropriate Boundaries

Forgiveness doesn't require continued exposure to abuse or toxic behavior. It's possible to forgive someone while establishing healthy boundaries to protect yourself and others. Seek wise counsel about what boundaries are appropriate in specific situations.

Pursue Peace Without Compromising Truth

Sometimes conflicts involve genuine disagreements about truth or morality. In these cases, we're called to maintain both truth and love, even when that means agreeing to disagree. Unity doesn't require uniformity on every issue.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Conflict in Marriage

Marriage conflicts require special attention given the covenant nature of the relationship. Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7 provide specific guidance for husbands and wives. Couples should never threaten divorce during arguments, should go to bed reconciled when possible, and should seek counseling when patterns of conflict persist.

Conflict in the Church

Church conflicts can be particularly damaging to the body of Christ and to witness before unbelievers. First Corinthians 6:1-8 discourages lawsuits between believers. Church leaders should be involved in mediating significant disputes. The goal is always the health of the body and the glory of God.

Conflict with Unbelievers

When conflict involves those outside the faith, we're still called to the highest standard of conduct. Our response may be the clearest demonstration of the gospel they witness. First

Peter 3:15-16 calls believers to respond with gentleness and respect, maintaining a clear conscience.

Cultural Considerations

Different cultures approach conflict differently—some prefer direct confrontation while others value indirect communication. Wisdom requires sensitivity to cultural norms while adhering to biblical principles. What feels respectful in one context may feel offensive in another.

CONCLUSION

Conflict resolution is both an art and a discipline, requiring the grace of God and our intentional effort. As we apply biblical principles with practical wisdom, we have the opportunity to demonstrate the transformative power of the gospel in our relationships. Every conflict resolved in a godly manner strengthens our character, deepens our relationships, and brings glory to the God of peace.

The ultimate model for conflict resolution is Christ Himself, who reconciled us to God while we were still His enemies. He absorbed the cost of our sin, extended undeserved grace, and made peace possible through His sacrifice. As recipients of such mercy, we're empowered and obligated to extend the same grace to others.

May we be known as peacemakers who reflect the character of our Heavenly Father, building bridges where walls once stood, and demonstrating that reconciliation is always worth the effort when pursued with humble hearts and Christ-centered love.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Which biblical principle for conflict resolution do you find most challenging to apply? Why?
2. Think of a current or recent conflict in your life. How might you have approached it differently based on the principles outlined here?
3. Are there any relationships in your life that need attention or reconciliation? What steps could you take this week?
4. How can you cultivate a heart that's quick to forgive and slow to take offense?
5. In what ways does the gospel's message of reconciliation inform how you approach conflicts?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Books:

- "The Peacemaker" by Ken Sande
- "Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands" by Paul David Tripp
- "When Sinners Say 'I Do'" by Dave Harvey
- "Pursuing Peace" by Robert D. Jones

Organizations:

- Peacemaker Ministries (peacemaker.net)
- Institute for Christian Conciliation

Scripture Memory Verses:

- Matthew 5:9
- Matthew 18:15
- Romans 12:18
- Ephesians 4:15
- Colossians 3:13
- James 1:19