

Conflict Management

Listed Scriptures

1 Sam 1; Mt 5:9; Lk 23:1–12; Mk 14:32–51; Gen 26:12–31; Jas 3:16–18

Lesson Aim

- 1) To discuss the conflicts that can arise.
- 2) To understand how God wants us to deal with conflicts.
- 3) To brainstorm specific steps that can be taken to manage conflicts.

Memory Verse

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Sons of God.”
(Mt 5:9)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Hosea 4–6

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



The Bible records many conflicts between people. What is important, however, is how they are dealt with. A godly attitude, response and prayer can make a huge difference in how the process unfolds. Gideon had a remarkable gift for defusing conflicts. In Judges 8:1–3, the Ephraimites accused and criticized Gideon sharply. His response was truthful, gentle and complimentary. This caused their resentment and anger towards him to subside, proving that “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

In Mark 14:32–51, the Lord Jesus demonstrated His gentle but firm nature in dealing with conflict. He did not shout at or fight with those who came for His life, but rather offered them peace and mercy. In the same manner in Luke 23:1–12 and John 18:19–24, the Lord Jesus did not rebuke those who were mocking or striking Him. Under persecution, our Lord did not strike back, but endured it all patiently

and willingly, for He knew that it was the Lord's will.

Isaac also demonstrated gentleness and peacefulness when he was persecuted for his wells (Gen 26:12-31). Never once did he argue with the Philistines. Instead, he would quietly give way to them and move on. He trusted in the Lord whom He knew would bring it to pass. When we encounter conflicts, are we also able to entrust everything to the Lord and believe that He will bring it to pass?

W A R M U P



In the cafeteria at school, you return to your plate to find that someone has poured milk on your sandwich. There are at least two other students nearby. What do you do?

Ask students for their responses. Then say, "There are many different ways to react to this situation. You could be very angry, throw a fit and walk off. Or you could calmly ask them if they were involved and why they did it. Or you could ignore it."

Conflict is inevitable whenever you have a group of people together. This is true at home, at work, at school, and even at church. We must learn to manage it in a true Christian way so that we can give glory to our Lord and benefit others in the process.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

Conflict

As human beings we like to argue. We argue from young to old and we argue with many different people. We even argue with God, questioning Him why certain things may be. A sister once testified how she held a grudge against the Lord for an entire year, during which she didn't go to church. Later she returned to the Lord. Inevitably as humans, we will always end up in conflicting situations. But the way we deal with it or our outlook on it could be the difference in whether we are successful or not.



A. What are the causes of conflict?

Learning about the causes of conflict will help us be more aware of them and will enable us not to fall into conflicts with others.

a. Discontent (Acts 6:1; Judg 8:1)

A great conflict arose at the church in the apostolic days because the Hellenists thought that their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Discontent is often the root cause of conflicts. We become very unhappy with certain situations and we begin to grumble. Instead of going to someone for help, we start to murmur to other people. In the end, things get blown way out of proportion and strife ensues. When we are unhappy about certain situations, do something about it, rather than grumble.

b. Doubt and Fear (Acts 15:39)

In the book of Acts, it records how Barnabas and Paul had a great argument over whether to take Mark along with them on their missionary trip. Barnabas was determined to take Mark, but Paul insisted that they should not take him with them because he was afraid Mark might leave them again, like he did on their previous trip. In Genesis 12:12 it also records how Abram told his wife Sarai to say that she was his sister because he was afraid that he would be killed because of her. Conflicts can thus arise because of doubt and fear within ourselves.

c. Sin (Rom 7:10-17)

In this passage, Paul states that it is the sin within him which makes him do what he hates. When we encounter confrontational situations, it is sometimes due to the sinful nature within us. We need to subdue our nature and rely on the Lord for help.



B. What type of person do we want to be?

a. Those Who Are Defeated by Strife

Such people fail in their arguments, not because they did not win the argument itself, but because they have a pessimistic outlook on life. Their hearts are full of bitterness, and they cannot see any good in anybody. They see people around them as hypocrites, they are very unfriendly to people, and they always complain against others and God. They start to live in their own world and live a very defeatist life.

b. Those Who Overcome Strife

Although this type of person will also inevitably face some kind of argument, their outlook on life is more positive. They feel that people are wonderful, that everyone is nice and that God is good. They feel happy and optimistic. Consequently, such people have overcome strife and do not let strife overcome them.



Part 2

Who are the Culprits of Conflict?



A. Those Who Are Quick Tempered (Prov 29:22; 30:33)

Here it tells us that all those who are easily angered will stir up strife. We all meet such people in our lives, whether at school, at work, in our family, or at church, even in ourselves! Proverbs 14:29 tells us that if we are not that easily angered, we have a good understanding, but if we have a hot temper, it shows that we don't have that much wisdom. Sometimes we have a split personality. People tell us to do things and we always agree. But when our family instructs us to do something, we always say no. Colossians 3:8 reminds us that once we become a Christian, we must put away all this anger, wrath, and malice. This is not just a matter of putting it away in public or at church, but also at home. Only through the power of God are we able to do this. Let's ask God's power to work within us so that we can get rid of our bad temper in order to avoid causing strife.



B. Those Who Have a Contentious Heart (Prov 26:21)

What is a contentious person? It is someone who likes to compare or compete with others. There are two kinds of comparisons in this world. The first is a good comparison where the individual imitates and learns from the good qualities of others. Such people look at the Bible and see how they should act. The second is a bad comparison. In James 3:14–16 it states, "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth." Such things can cause people to be in conflict with one another. In addition, some people like to compete out of envy and self-seeking. For example, some youths like to compare themselves with other youths on their performance at school to the way they dress. Such comparisons come from inappropriate and ungodly feelings of being jealous, self-seeking, and overly ambitious.



C. Those Who Have a Proud Heart (Prov 22:10)

Sometimes we don't even know that we are proud, but when we constantly insist on our own way, this is inner or hidden pride. When King Saul sinned against the Lord and was unrepentant, Samuel questioned him, "Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?" (1 Sam 15:19). By insisting on his own way, Saul caused unnecessary trouble.

Once, a brother and sister were fighting over a tricycle. The dad came and said to the brother, "Let your sister play." The brother said no, so the father turned to the sister and said, "Let your brother play," but she said no too. The father was upset, so he sawed the tricycle in half. When children disobey their parents it is a manifestation of pride. Those who disobey their parents disobey God; He will bring it to judgment one day. We must obey our parents in the Lord, and not seek our own will.



D. Those Who Gossip (Prov 16:28; 26:20)

Gossipers are different from informers. Informers will say what they have to say to the right person. In Jeremiah 40:13–16, Gedaliah failed to discern a gossip from an informer. Don't be a gossip. Be careful of what you say. Don't be one who starts strife. (See also Lesson 4: Communication III. Do Not Gossip)



Part 3

How Do We Overcome Strife?

"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins" (Prov 10:12). Even if we try to avoid conflicts, they can still arise. What should we do? In the book of 1 Samuel it records how Hannah was barren and how Peninnah, Elkanah's other wife, would constantly provoke her. Peninnah was jealous of Hannah because Elkanah gave her a double portion. Hannah cried and refused to eat. If somebody were to abuse us like that, how would we react? Hannah could have reacted by fighting back, yet she didn't. Let's look into what Hannah did and learn how we too can overcome strife.



A. To Have a Gentle and Quiet Spirit (1 Sam 1:7)

Hannah reacted by not eating. This is a demonstration of her inner gentleness and her quiet spirit. Likewise, when we are in the middle of a conflict, we must be gentle (1 Pet 3:4f). Our gentleness will calm the storm and bring peace. In Romans 12:17–21, it tells us to “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. ‘Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”



B. To Believe in the Lord and to Inquire Help from Him (1 Sam 1:9–12)

When Hannah was provoked, she went to God. She was wise and made the right choice. When we are in a conflict, pray to God about the problem. People may criticize us or spread gossip about us. Just pray. God is just, and those who obey Him will experience perfect justice in due time. God may seem silent, but His silence is not condoning sin, nor is He indifferent to it. He is withholding deserved punishment, giving time for His people to repent (Rom 12:19). Our Heavenly Father understands every problem and sees every tear. He will act in due time.

We need to go before God until we get His perspective on the conflict. Do not act or speak out of rashness, anger or a sense of injustice. Moses had to learn this. His loss of temper in conflict situations cost him 40 years in the wilderness on one occasion, and the loss of entry to the Promised Land on another. However, when he did get God’s perspective on situations, he was able to intercede with power and resolve even the most difficult of situations.

Prayer is essential. We must pray that our attitude will be loving and that God will provide us with His wisdom and insight to work through the issue. Paul exhorts us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17) and to “let all that [you] do be done with love” (1 Cor 16:14).



C. To Entrust Everything to God (1 Sam 1:13-18)

Hannah solved her problems by entrusting all to God. It is not easy to entrust all to God, but she knew the secret of surrendering herself to Him. Eli didn’t even know the situation and quite simply told her to “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him” (1 Sam 1:17). Hannah obeyed, went home and entrusted all to God. This is not easy to do. We may pray about our problems, but how often do we completely entrust everything to Him?

Matthew 11:28–30 records the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ to us. The more we pray, the more we will receive the peace from God. We need to be anxious for nothing, but let our requests be made known to God (Phil 4:6f).

There was a preacher who became nervous each time he preached on the pulpit, which resulted in a sore stomach. One day he had a dream. In his dream, he was carrying a big heavy sack walking along the road. He saw an empty car pass by, allowed it to pass and continued to walk with his heavy sack. What was the Lord trying to tell him? Why didn’t he use that empty car? The Lord was reminding him that he had to entrust everything to Him. Likewise, when we work for God we need to entrust all to Him. If not, we will end up continuing to carry our heavy burdens. It is our choice whether to grasp the opportunity to solve the problem. When we truly know the will of God, we will naturally entrust everything to Him, just like Hannah.

In 1 Samuel 1:24–28 it records how, not long after Hannah entrusted everything to God, He was able to solve all her problems: she conceived and bore a son. When her problem was solved, she gave thanks to the Lord and gave back to Him what He gave her (1 Sam 2:21). Consequently, God blessed her abundantly. Let us learn from Hannah’s good example and entrust all to the Lord. By doing so, we will reap great benefits in the end.



Part 4

How Do We Manage Conflicts?

Often, conflicts arise because of a lack of or bad communication. Thus, apart from the biblical principles outlined above, let’s look into some practical effective remedies to handle conflict:



A. Talk it Out

Being able to talk it out usually leads to a win-win situation, but how something is worded is vitally important (Prov 25:11–13). Whatever we say should be clear, kind, true and appropriate. There is a right time and a right way to say things. Don't get emotional, nor be harsh or absolute (Prov 15:1). Gently but firmly confront them (Prov 17:14). Unless people are confronted with their wrong behaviors they most likely will not change. But do remember that people are more likely to learn from a gentle reminder than a dogmatic approach.



B. Seek Help (Mt 18:15-17)

Only involve others when we think they need to be involved. Matthew 18:15–17 provides us with a wise three-step approach when dealing with conflicts:

- i. Go and tell the person his/her fault
- ii. If he/she will not listen, take two or three people with us to remind him/her
- iii. If he/she refuses to hear them, tell it to the church

This three-step approach provides us with a direct way to approach conflict. Getting help is usually the best choice when handling a conflict. However, it also depends whom we get help from. We need to seek help from someone who is spiritual so that they can help support us in prayer and offer us words of advice and encouragement from the Scriptures. Use wisdom to judge whom we should seek help from.



C. Ignore It

There are times when ignoring the situation is the best remedy for a conflict. Sometimes it takes strength and wisdom just to walk away from a situation. A brother testified of how, before his conversion, he would always end up getting into fights with people because of the anger he had within him. Once, there was an entire group of people who came to him looking for a fight. He thanked God for giving him the wisdom to run away from the situation. As the wise King Solomon says, "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back" (Prov 29:11). We need to learn to hold our tongues and walk away from conflict.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING



1 Looking at the causes of conflict, which one do you think causes people to encounter conflict the most?

2 What are the four kinds of people who cause conflict?

3 Is there a category which you think you would be most susceptible to? How could you deal with it?

4 What are the three ways of overcoming strife? Which one is the most difficult for you to do? Why?

5 What is the three-step approach recorded in Matthew when dealing with conflicts?

6 In your opinion, which of the three effective remedies to dealing with conflict would you have a tendency to use? Why?

LIFE APPLICATION

Part A: Resolving Conflicts



Please read the following case studies carefully and provide a solution for each one. Try to back up your solutions with some

Bible verses.

Case A

A group of youths like to have their fellowship service on Friday night, but some adult members have commented negatively about it since it dramatically reduces the number of people attending the regular service.

1. What advice/solution would you give to these youths?

Case B

Rose and Tracy are roommates. Rose is our church sister, but Tracy isn't. Rose is a very organized and clean individual. Tracy is the opposite. Whereas Rose would put her dirty laundry into the laundry basket, Tracy would spread hers in little piles

all over the room. Tracy hardly ever takes out the garbage, let alone deals with the boxed remains of five-day old pizza! Because of their different ideas about what cleanliness means, it led to a fair share of arguments and conflicts. Rose is unsure of how to deal with this situation. How can you help her?

1. What advice/tips can you offer to Rose in order to improve the state of her dorm room and to improve relations with her roommate?
2. How should she approach Tracy about this?

Case C

James is rather hesitant and feels uncomfortable about doing cleaning work around the church. He thinks that the church can afford to hire professionals to do a much better job than he can. He'd rather serve the Lord in other areas. Because of his reluctance and unwillingness to do this work, his relationship with certain church members has become strained.

1. What advice would you offer James?

Case D

Mary doesn't like the idea that her daughter is dating a brother. She thinks that at 19, she's too young to be dating. Her daughter refuses to listen to her.

1. How would you advise Mary and her daughter?

Case E

Jake and Phil live in the same neighborhood and go to the same local church. They spend much of their free time together. However, all that changed after Jake returned the DVD player he had borrowed from Phil. The DVD player was damaged! Furious, Phil called Jake who confessed he had dropped it accidentally. Phil asked Jake to get him a new one, but he refused. They had a heated argument and they refused to talk to each other. Eventually Jake came around and bought a new DVD player for Phil. Phil, however, simply snatched the DVD player from Jake's hand and said, "It's about time!" They do not talk to each other anymore.

1. What problems do you see in this case?
2. How would you advise both Jake and Phil?

(Adapted version from *A New Life in Christ, A Workbook for New Believers, 9: Repentance*, True Jesus Church, 2000)

Part B: Conflicting Situations

There are many types of conflict that can arise among family members, friends, co-workers, and church brothers and sisters. For each category, think of a conflict that may arise and think of specific steps that can be taken to manage them.

CATEGORY	CONFLICT	RESOLUTION
Family		
Friends		
Co-workers in church		
Brothers and sisters in Christ		

REFLECTION & PRAYER



*Sing hymn 230: Blest Is He Who Never Consents.
 "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'" (1 Pet 4:8).
 When dealing with conflict, the only way to come out strong is if we love those who have wronged us with the love of God. Only with His love will we be able to overlook the situation and learn to live harmoniously among our family members, our friends, and our church brethren. Let us always be filled with the Holy Spirit and be able to have a heart of love and forgiveness.*