

Conflict Resolution

INTRODUCTION

Why do we fight with the people we love the most?

Conflict = Disagreements that result in warfare.

BIBLICAL GOALS OF CONFLICT

1. Engage in conflict in a God-honoring way.

“A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath” (Prov. 15:1).

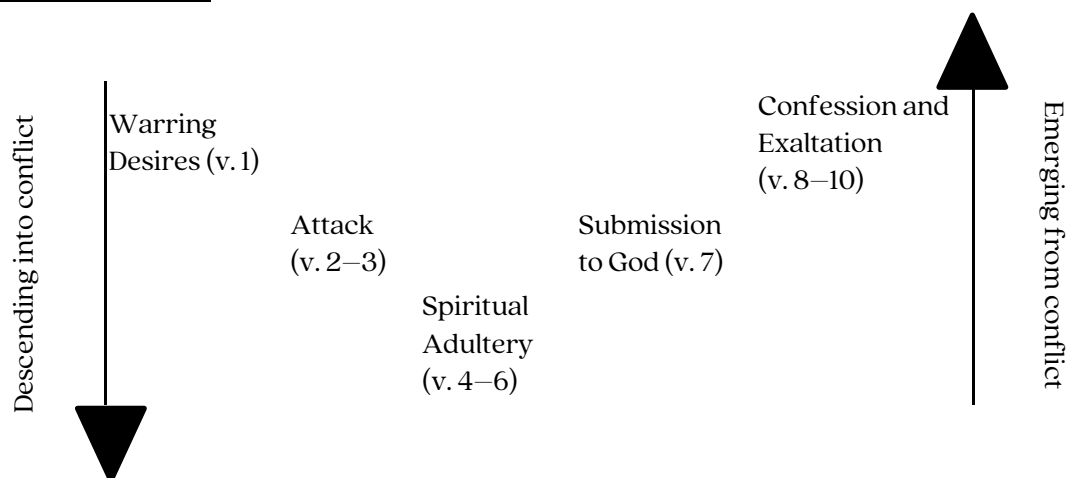
2. Grow in wisdom.

“Honor belongs to the person who ends a dispute, but any fool can get himself into a quarrel” (Prov. 20:3).

3. Pursue peace.

“God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33).

Conflict in James 4:1–10



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THE SOURCE OF CONFLICT: WARRING DESIRES

“What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don’t they come from your passions that wage war within you?” (Jas. 4:1).

How to seek understanding in the midst of conflict:

1. Listen

“My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger” (Jas. 1:19).

2. Ask questions

“Counsel in a person’s heart is deep water; but a person of understanding draws it out” (Prov. 20:5).

3. Clarify assumptions

“[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7).

TEMPTATION IN CONFLICT: SELF-PROTECTIVE ATTACK

“You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and don’t receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (Jas. 4:2–3).

1. Self-Protection

a. Husbands

b. Wives

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2. Attack

Self-control in our speech

“When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is prudent” (Prov. 10:19). “A city is built up by the blessing of the upright, but it is torn down by the mouth of the wicked” (Prov. 11:11).

- a. Don’t respond in kind.

“Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

- b. Pause the fight.

“Patience is better than power, and controlling one’s emotions, than capturing a city” (Prov. 16:32).

- c. Rely on the Spirit.

“...to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, 23 to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth” (Eph. 4:22–24).

THE TURNING POINT IN CONFLICT

“You adulterous people! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God. 5 Or do you think it’s without reason that the Scripture says: The spirit he made to dwell in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives greater grace. Therefore he says: God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. 7 Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:4–7).

The turning point: “Submit” to God

Implications

- 1. **Wherever you see an opportunity to obey God, obey.**

- 2. **Don’t indulge your sin and create greater distance in the marriage.**

“For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love” (Gal. 5:13).

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3. Hit the pause button.

4. Ask for help.

RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (Jas. 4:8–10).

1. An amazing promise from God if we draw near to him.

Taking it out for a spin (Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say I Do*, 63–75)

- a. First Gear: In humility, suspect yourself first.
- b. Second Gear: In integrity, inspect yourself first.
- c. Third Gear: Admit that circumstances only reveal existing sin.
- d. Fourth Gear: Focus on undeserved grace, not unmet needs.

2. Anatomy of a good confession:

- a. Confess your **action**, heart **attitude**; ask for forgiveness.
- b. Use **biblical** language when you confess.
- c. Articulate the **cost** of your sin as best as you can.
- d. Explain what you’re going to **do** to repent.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON:

- Read the appendix attached to this lesson: “Handling Conflict.”

APPENDIX: HANDLING CONFLICT

(Adapted from Winston T. Smith's *Marriage Matters*, pp. 152–157)

Difficulties in communication are likely the result of desires in your heart that your spouse is not fulfilling. You will eventually discover as a couple that you only have one or two disagreements in your marriage—stemming from these unfulfilled desires—that you will repeat over and over again. A key aspect of growing in conflict resolution will be discovering the root sins that are feeding these desires and cooperating with the Holy Spirit in putting them to death so you can walk in holiness.

COMMON STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING CONFLICT

Understanding how your wants and desires are contributing to conflict can be a challenge. There are three general ways that we tend to respond to conflict. Recognizing which strategy you favor can provide clues to the underlying desires that are fueling your quarrels. Which describes your typical approach?

1. **Appeasing**: *Finding a way to placate or satisfy others so that there's no reason for conflict.* People who appease often say things that they don't really mean and agree to things that they don't want to do. If this is your strategy, you likely appear very laid back and easy-going. Others, including your spouse, seem to think well of you and enjoy your company. But relationships are difficult when you constantly have to hide what you think and how you feel to avoid the possibility of offending others. When you misrepresent your true thoughts and feelings, you feel unknown, unloved, and misunderstood. When you do things that you don't really want to do, you feel frustrated and unhappy. Saying yes to everything is an overwhelming burden. Because you don't feel the freedom to talk directly to the objects of your anger, you tend to stew in silence or discuss the situation with someone else. When attempts to appease begin to fail and conflicts with a person become more frequent or intense, appeasers usually find a way to cut off the relationship.
2. **Ignoring**: *Pretending that the problem doesn't exist. Ignorers avoid the conversation entirely.* They may avoid sharing their opinion, or they may share it and shut down any attempts to have open and honest dialogue about the issue. Rather than agreeing to requests, ignorers just delay decisions in an attempt to avoid getting pinned down, or when pressed, they tend to say, "no." Conflict is still possible but only if it's unavoidable. Even if you choose not to acknowledge the problems and conflicts in your relationships, they still exist and they will only get worse over time if you don't address them directly.
3. **Winning**: *Settling problems by prevailing.* People who want to win will work hard to ensure that their interests prevail in conflict. They don't seem intimidated or reluctant to engage in conflict; in fact, they might even enjoy it. Winners tend to be skilled in communicating, persuading, and even intimidating. If this is your primary strategy, your emotions (like anger, fear, and frustration) are an active part of the argument. Your emotional tendencies tend to add pressure to your words. While this strategy escapes most of the pitfalls of avoiding and appeasing, it tends to drive problems underground when others, realizing that they are unlikely to be heard, simply cave into this emotional pressure.

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Based on your preferred strategy for handling conflict, you can begin to identify the desires and fears that are fueling the conflict.

Strategies	Appeasing (Moving Toward)	Ignoring (Moving Away)	Winning (Moving Against)
Desires	Acceptance, intimacy, belonging	Comfort, security, perfection, order, control	Success, power, control, admiration
Fears	Rejection, isolation, shame	Hassles, chaos, punishment, being controlled	Failure, humiliation, being dominated, weakness

BIBLICAL STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING CONFLICT

- 1. Yielding.** “Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:5). Defensiveness is an obstacle to resolving conflict, but we can defuse it by following Jesus’ exhortation to examine ourselves first. When you realize that you have erred—whether by misunderstanding, misinterpreting, or sinning—you must yield and admit your mistake or confess your sin. Even when you are right, you may need to yield to your spouse’s desires or preferences because to do otherwise would cause harm. This follows the example set by God, who had every right to reject or destroy us because of our sin but instead sacrificed his rights and his Son to restore relationship with us. Loving your spouse well may require you to surrender what you think you deserve for his or her benefit.
- 2. Waiting.** “Honor belongs to the person who ends a dispute, but any fool can get himself into a quarrel” (Prov. 20:3). Choosing to avoid or postpone conflict may reflect how God loves us. No matter how aware you are of your sins, you can safely assume that you’re guilty of countless others. If our holy God were to confront us every moment we sinned, it would be unbearable. In this sense, God postpones challenging us until we are ready to grow and change. As you try to love your spouse as God loves you, it may require postponing a conflict when he or she is not ready to hear what you have to say. It may mean overlooking a minor offense altogether because it’s out of character and you can sympathize with the circumstances. Or it may mean taking a longer view and understanding that some of your spouse’s weaknesses and sins are part of a long-term battle. Rather than addressing every instance of failing, we need to be patient with our spouse.
- 3. Confronting.** “Do not harbor hatred against your brother. Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him. Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:17–18). Once you realize that sin, not your spouse, is the real enemy, then you can begin to understand the necessity of addressing it. We must not react angrily, but we must also resist the temptation to think we have overlooked an offense when we have only tucked it away and allowed it to become a silent grudge. The Bible teaches us that there are times to speak directly and honestly about a problem.