

Living in the Path of Peace – Part 1

Steps to overcoming conflict

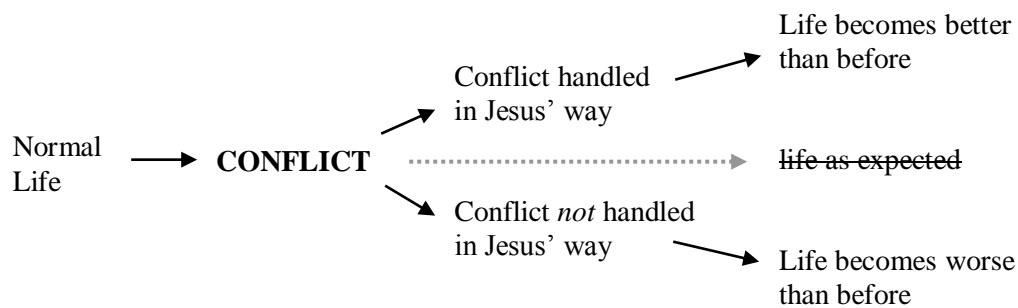
By Dave Coles - © 2013 Freedom for the Captives Ministries

Where there are people, there is conflict. How can we make the most of it? And what does God have to say about all this?

Every Conflict Offers an Opportunity

It's natural to desire to live without conflict. That's what we were created for. Before the Fall, there was no conflict in the Garden of Eden. But when sin entered, conflicts began. God has a plan for a perfect world, where there's no more conflict. Every human heart longs to be in that place – no more conflict, pain or tears.

While we're in this world that's touched by sin, we will have conflicts. And that's not an entirely bad thing - because within every conflict, God has hidden opportunities. When conflict comes, life will not remain the same. It will either get better or worse. And the choice is largely up to you.



A lot of us would rather avoid conflict, and just hope the problem will go away - or that the problem person will just go away. But that is not Jesus' way. He has something better for us.

If handled in a biblical way, conflict can bring personal growth and progress in ministry. (An example is found in Acts 6:1-7.) The steps to conflict resolution are not all easy. Some of them are at odds with our selfish human nature. But if we're willing to be shaped by God and follow the instructions He has given us in his owner's manual, *every* conflict can bring spiritual growth and good fruit in our lives.

Dangers that Arise if Conflict is Avoided or not Handled Well

In 1 Samuel 17, we see an example of someone trying to avoid conflict. In this story, King Saul and the whole army of Israel had gathered to do battle with the Philistines. They had gathered to do battle, but they weren't doing battle. Why? When they heard the threats of the giant Goliath, "*Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.*" (1 Sam 17:11). Even now, a lot of us avoid conflict for the same reason: "Too scary!"

What was David's attitude toward the conflict? We see in verse 26 that he really believed the problem (which in this case was the giant) could be overcome: "*What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace?*" And then he says to Saul – to the KING! "*Let no one lose heart on account of the Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.*" With

which of these two men was God pleased: Saul or David? When a conflict arises, let's ask ourselves: Do I want to respond to this like Saul or like David?

Some of the results when we avoid God's instructions for dealing with conflict:

1. We disobey Jesus' clear command. *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."* (Mat 5:23,24).

According to Jesus, resolving conflict is so important that it takes first priority!

2. We invite God's judgment on us if we don't forgive. One time Peter asked Jesus, *"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?"* (Mat 18:21-35). And Jesus responds with a story, which finishes with the horrifying words, *"In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."* According to Jesus, this is very serious matter. It is essential to forgive from the heart. Forgiveness is an essential part of conflict resolution. If you have a conflict with someone and you've not forgiven them, that's an issue to work through as soon as possible.

3. The world doesn't see the testimony Jesus commanded us to give. *"By this all [people] will know..."* (John 13:35;17:20b,21). Conflict among Christians is a major reason unbelievers often are not interested in receiving the Good News, as they conclude there's no difference in the way we live.

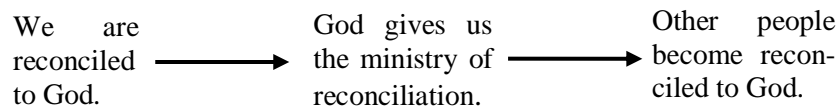
4. We miss the blessings God wants to give (Psalm 133:1, 3b). God wants to do amazing and wonderful things among us. Let's keep the door open for him to do that transforming work.

5. Gossip. The problem needs to be talked about. But it looks *too hard* to talk to the person who's actually involved. It seems a lot easier to talk to our friends, who will just listen to our side of the story and sympathize with us. *"Oh yes, she's so awful. She did that to me once, too."* And instead of getting *rid* of the poison, we spread it around.

Like a pan boiling with the lid stuck on, you can't keep it in. If you try, it will eventually explode. If you don't deal with the problem, it *will* leak out somewhere. Better to take the pressure off in *God's* way.

The Foundation of Conflict Resolution: Who Jesus is, and Who We are in Him

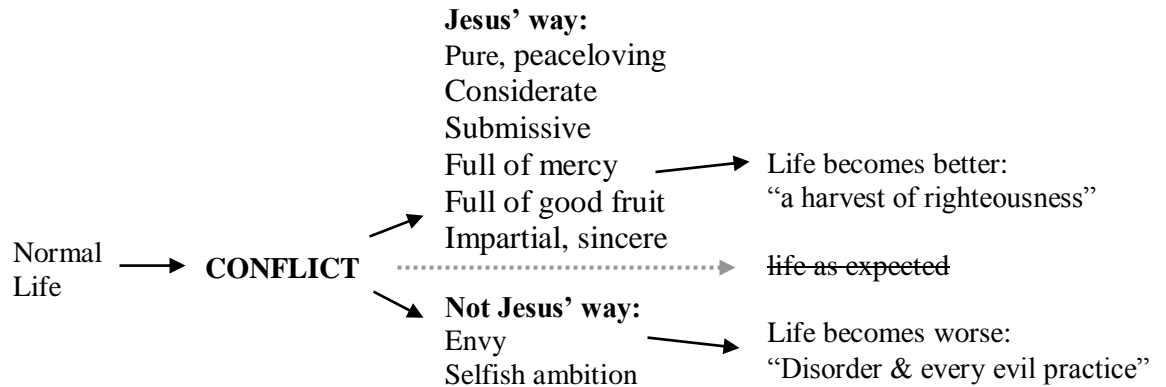
Jesus is the Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:5b). God *"reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"* 2 Cor 5:18-20. This process is not automatic; it takes work.



The process of reconciliation as described in 2 Cor 5:18-21

Two Ways of Handling Conflict

We can't avoid conflict. What are we going to do when conflict arises? In James 3:13-18, we see described two kinds of "wisdom" (two ways to face conflict).



Even Christians, if we don't intentionally choose the way of wisdom from above, will tend to do "what comes naturally," that is follow the downward path. If we want to respond well to conflict, we need to put our feelings, our reactions, etc. in *second* place, and God's priorities in *first* place.

Pattern from Phil 4:6, 7

1. *Catch* the fact that you're feeling something unpleasant.
2. *Take time to talk about the problem with the Lord*, sharing your feelings and thoughts.
3. *Present your request* to the Lord in prayer.
4. *Give thanks* for a number of things related to the issue and the person involved. (details)
5. *Wait quietly* to hear the Lord's response.

Reflection Questions

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much are you experiencing:
 - Peace within your self?
 - Peace with God?
 - Peace with other people?
2. Think of a conflict you've experienced or observed recently. Consider the attitudes, actions and words of those involved.
 - In what ways did those attitudes, actions and words reflect the upward path, and in what ways did they reflect the downward path?
 - What would need to change, for the conflict you're thinking of, to be addressed according to the "wisdom from above"?
3. What, if anything, would you like to change about how you respond to conflict?

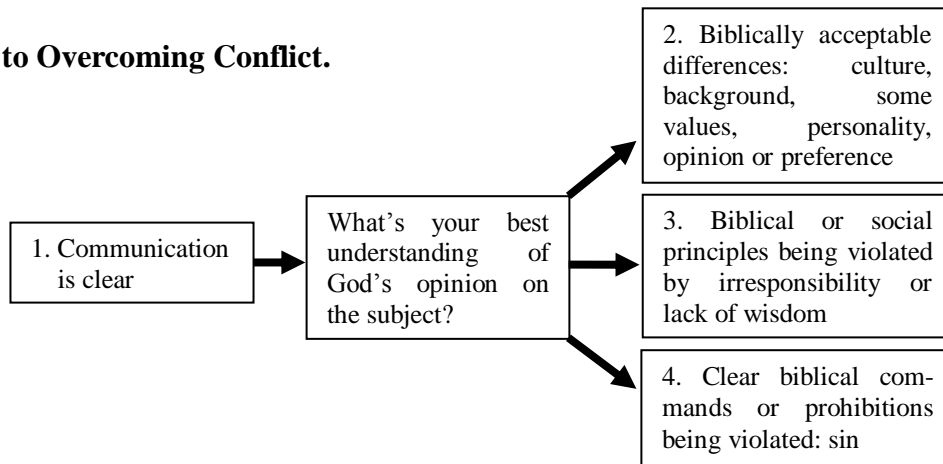
Living in the Path of Peace – Part 2

Steps to overcoming conflict

The Four Most Common Causes of Conflict

1. Miscommunication
2. Differences in Culture, Background, Values, Personality, Opinion or Preference
3. Overcoming Conflict Caused by Irresponsibility, Lack of Wisdom, or Insensitivity (to others' feelings)
4. Selfishness or Other Sins

A Roadmap to Overcoming Conflict.

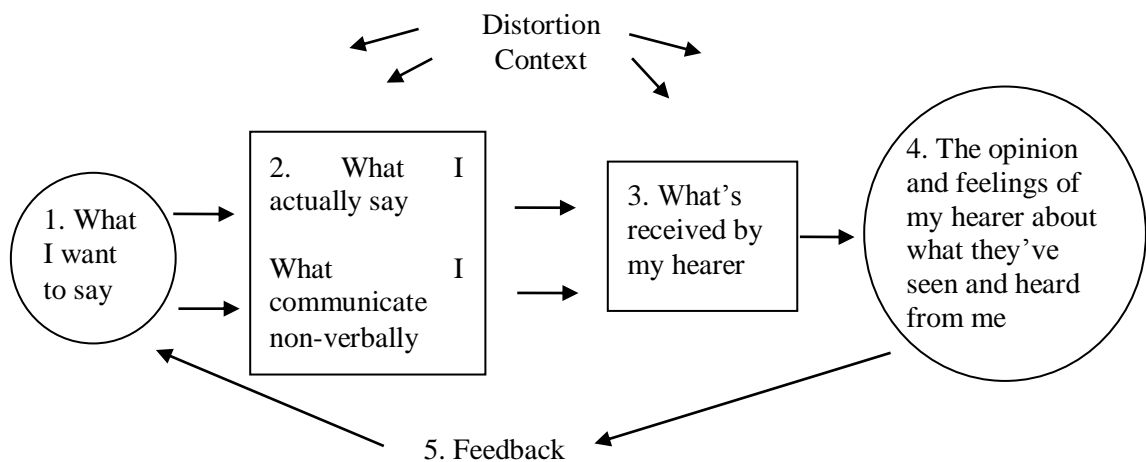


How can we tell which (one or more) of these is causing a particular conflict? Check them in order (from 1 to 4). First check to see if it's a communication problem. They can be the easiest to solve, if you're aware of the dynamics involved. If communication is not the problem, next check choice 2, then choice 3, then choice 4, according to your best understanding of God's opinion on the matter.

1. Overcoming Conflicts Caused by Miscommunication

Most of us communicate based on a false assumption: "What the other person heard is what I intended to say." The fact is that what they heard is sometimes wildly different than what you meant to say! Why does this happen? Because there are many ways that communication can go wrong.

Communication



Is there any way to check how well the message is getting through? Yes. Feedback. One clue that communication has gone wrong is that the response you get is not what you expected. When the feedback you get isn't what you wanted, the natural response is to be irritated, then respond in a negative way, which can quickly become vicious cycle.

When something seems to be going wrong in an interaction, check to see if there's been a miscommunication. Clarify what you're hearing and see if it's what they're trying to communicate. Use feedback to work toward understanding each other's ideas, feelings & position (whether or not you agree).

2. Overcoming Conflicts Caused by Differences in Culture, Background, Values, Personality, Opinion or Preference

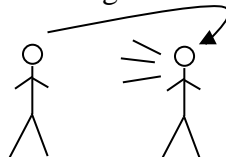
Our main problem is *we want to be God – to set ourselves up as the standard of what's right in the universe*. This was Satan's original temptation: "You will be like God." It's amazing how much of that temptation still sticks to each of us. But the fact is, *There's only one "I AM," and you're not it*. Neither am I. Most of us need a bigger dose of humility.

We need to really believe and live that it's okay for other people to be different from us in a lot of ways. Some differences are good and God-given. Some are just a matter of preference. And even some differences that are sinful, God has said he will take care of later. It's not our job to fix everything that's wrong in the world. We need to let *God* take care of being God, and focus our energy on the things he has told us to do – such as being the fragrance of Christ in the midst of a dark world.

God tells us to deal with serious sin in the church. But the fact is that God is a lot more tolerant than many of us are. We can't stand to have people be wrong or disagree with us, on a thousand different things. But God knows that *you're* wrong, about some of those very things. And He still loves you. And sometimes it's just a difference in the way we were raised, that (for example) makes me feel more comfortable when I'm dressed in old crummy clothes, and maybe makes you more comfortable when you're dressed nicely.

We too often set ourselves up as the standard of these things, use the Bible to defend our preferences, and then get offended when everybody doesn't agree with us. For example, some Christians think it's okay to drink alcohol in moderation; others think it's better never to touch it. Rather than argue about these things, sometimes it's good to ask, "What makes this important to you?" and then just *listen*. You can learn a lot of important information that way. This means being interested in the other person, because they're a person made in God's image.

Phil 2:4 says, "*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also the interests of others.*" This involves seeing and trying to understand where the other person's coming from. God sees their point of view (whether he agrees with it or not). How about if we try to be like Him in this way as well?



Romans 14:1-23 says it's okay to differ on minor issues. If God says it's okay, why do we argue about them? *"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Rom 15:7).*

General Steps to Overcome Conflicts Influenced by Differences

1. Take into account (and view in a positive light) differences in personality and background, between yourself and others involved in the conflict. Sometimes useful to learn about someone's background. (Culture, region of the country, family, etc)
2. Give feedback about what you're catching of their view. (i.e.: "I want to make sure I'm understanding you correctly. Is this what you're saying?" Then share what you understand to be their opinions, desire, goals, etc.)
3. Listen as they correct where you may have gotten it wrong.
4. Accept all kinds of people and differences that God accepts. (Rom 14:1-15:7)

3. Overcoming Conflict Caused by Irresponsibility, Lack of Wisdom, or Insensitivity (to others' feelings)

For these kinds of problems, the main issue is: what's the nature of your relationship with this person? Are you in a position of respect and authority to speak into this issue in this person's life?

1. What authority has God given you?
2. What authority has society or your position given you?
3. What amount of respect or authority do you have in the eyes of this person? How much have they invited you to speak into their lives?

It's important HOW we address the issue. Are we speaking to vent our anger or frustration, or are we speaking (and thinking) in a way that's likely to bring actual change? *"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in setting of silver. Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear"* (Prov 25:11,12). Invest the time and energy to consider what approach is most likely to bring good fruit. In any case, pray for God to help them grow.

Lots of conflicts between parents and children land in this category. For more information on this, see the article, "Raising Godly Children," online at www.freemin.org. (http://www.en.freemin.org/Godly_children.htm)

4. Overcoming Conflict Caused by Selfishness or Other Sins

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (James 4:1). Selfishness is not the *only* cause of conflict in the world, but it's certainly the most common. Many conflicts happen because one or both people are being selfish. The temptation is to see how *other people* are being selfish, and entirely miss the ways that *we ourselves* are being selfish.

Jesus gives clear teaching on how to deal with sin among fellow believers. Matthew 18 is not the only text that's relevant, but it's a key one, and one that, if we follow it, will save us from a lot of unnecessary problems.

Jesus' Way of Responding to Other Christians' Sins

1. Admit and deal with our own flaws. (Mat 7:3-5) Sometimes that will solve the problem. You're irritated that they want their own way, because you want your own way!

2. If you're stuck and don't know whether you should talk to the person or not, consult someone to ask for wisdom; without sharing the person's name.
3. Talk with the person, "just between the two of you." Don't grumble against them to someone else. (James 5:9)
4. Clarify the facts, to make sure you've got them straight (Prov 18:13). Use polite and friendly questions (not accusatory). If you had wrong information, you might need to apologize.
5. Base all your comments on clear teachings of Scripture, not your own ideas or feelings. The goal of the process is *restoration* - of relationship with God and others.
6. If the person reacts by accusing *you*, listen with patience and humility. Ask the Lord if there's *anything* in what they say that you can agree to and apologize for. (Be a model of openness and the kind of attitude you hope they'll have.)
7. After you've talked through whatever issue(s) they may have raised, return to the issue with which you started. What's their response to that?
8. If they acknowledge their fault, pray with them, and let them know you don't hold anything against them. (Mat 18:15b)
9. If your word of correction is rejected, bring someone else along. Choose 1 or 2 people who are wise, and respected by this person (not someone sure to take your side). (Mat 18:16a)
10. Final steps. (Mat 18:17-20)

* If the person is not a believer, the process is different (both in what issues should be addressed, and how the process ends if it goes poorly). 1 Cor 5:12,13; Rom 12:18

What to Do When Conflict Resolution Fails

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" Rom 12:18.

Two Implications: It may not always be possible, it sometimes depends not only on you, but also on the response of someone else. But with that understanding of life in a sinful world, we still pursue the goal: "live at peace with everyone."

What to do?

1. Ask the Lord, "Is there anything else I can do?"
2. Make sure you've forgiven.
3. Seek wise counsel.
4. Pray for those involved, that God will bless them.

Some factors that make us weak and not at our best:

1. Physical factors : Sickness, hunger, thirst, tiredness,
2. Mental factors: stress, worry, feeling oppressed or disempowered. Could be money problems, unemployed, fears, etc Worry about something unrelated makes us more sensitive and likely to react.

These aren't *causes* of conflict, but make it easier for conflict to arise, and harder to deal well with it. When we realize these factors are at work, it's sometimes helpful to tell others about it. Lots of conflicts can be overcome if we have the humility to realize and admit these factors.

Reflection Questions

1. How have you noticed the four causes above operating in the conflicts you've experienced?
2. What might you like to incorporate from the above suggestions? What is your plan for overcoming any hindrances to this?

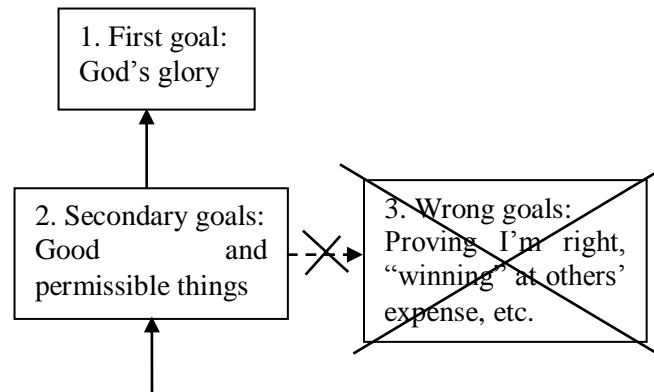
Living in the Path of Peace – Part 3

Steps to overcoming conflict

The Way Out of Conflict (Step 1)

1. Get God’s Perspective (& choose God’s way). We need to be aware that we’re fallible in this, and also that hearing from the other person can be a vital part of getting God’s perspective.

- A. Realize and acknowledge (at least to yourself) that there’s a conflict.** Don’t pretend it’s not there. *“Better is open rebuke than hidden love” (Prov 27:5).*
- B. Try to determine what cause(s) is/are at work in it.** If there’s likelihood of miscommunication, work through that. (See diagram above.)
- C. Pray for the situation and the person or people involved, asking the Lord for wisdom.** Surrender yourself, the people involved and the situation into the Lord’s hands, to accomplish His will.
- D. Get a better perspective.** The “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16b) = Jesus’ perspective on things. This is not automatic. See below for more on this step.
- E. Choose to act in accordance with God’s Word and the way of Jesus.**
- F. Check and correct your motivation.** Ask yourself: “What do I really want in this situation?” Check to make sure that your primary goal is God’s glory. Then define your secondary goal: [to get enough sleep, to buy some decent clothes, to get some time to yourself, etc]. Skip making “proving I’m right” your goal. Resist the temptation to have your goal change from what it originally was, to winning the argument or proving the other person wrong. Too often, once a conflict starts, the goal changes.



- G. Hope for the best and believe the best.** 1 Cor 13:7 says love “believes all things and hopes all things”. This doesn’t mean being stupid or naïve. But it means realizing that not everything that looks bad *is* bad. Not everything that sounds stupid *is* stupid. In fact, the stupider it sounds, the more likely it is that you don’t really understand what they meant. It’s a good cue to ask for clarification. The reality might be totally different than what you’re thinking.

More on getting a better perspective. There are three steps we can take to help us grow in seeing our situation more from Jesus’ perspective.

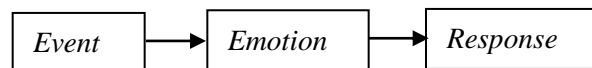
1. Check your own eye. (Mat 7:3-5).
2. Check and Process your Feelings. (See below for more on this step.)
3. Understand the spiritual warfare dynamics of the conflict. (present in every conflict)

- a. Our enemy is not flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12), even those who act like our enemies (2 Timothy 2:24-26). Resist the temptation to see Satan as being directly behind the other person/people, especially if they're followers of Christ.
- b. Satan desires to divide us (2 Corinthians 2:11). Work hard to not let him win. Reject the false accusations that run through your head about the other person/people, and take your thoughts captive. (Exodus 20:16; 2 Corinthians 10:5). Don't store up hurt feelings, bitterness, or suspicion. ("He/She did that because...")

More on Checking and Processing Your Feelings.

Each time something triggers a negative emotion in us, we have three choices: (1) we can "stuff" the emotion (pretend it's not there and try to push it out of sight), (2) respond (automatically) in accordance with the emotion (which often has negative consequences in cross-cultural ministry), or (3) process the emotion in a way that yields growth for us personally and the fragrance of Christ for those around us.

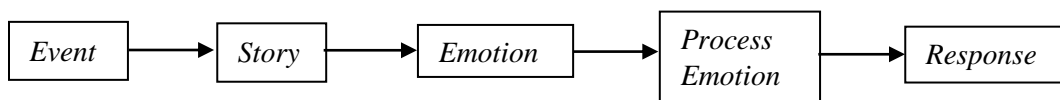
Typically, when something happens that makes us angry or afraid, we react selfishly. Then we regret our reaction; or perhaps worse, sometimes we *don't* regret it. The people who observe our reaction (or were the victims of it) lose respect for us, and thus we weaken our ability to have a Kingdom impact in their lives. We could diagram this basic pattern as:



The problem is not that we have emotions, or even that our emotions influence our responses. The problem is that our emotions (and thus our responses to them) are not enough shaped by the truth of Christ, and often running too much on an "automatic pilot" that was learned and developed by our sinful nature.

We know from Galatians 5 that God's Spirit makes it possible for us to live out emotional responses consistent with his Kingdom, when we walk in the Spirit. But *this process requires ongoing practice and discipline.*

Our goal is to insert into the "natural" process two additional elements, namely recognizing the "story" we're telling ourselves, and processing our feelings - so that the resulting pattern could be diagrammed like this:



The processing of emotions can be broken down into six steps:

a) Acknowledge and identify our feelings. A lot of times we're unaware of the feelings that are running around inside us, pushing us this way and that. The feelings with the most potential to derail our good intentions are those of which we're unaware. So the first essential step in the process is to recognize the signs that "something's happening" inside us. The sign might be a sense of something stirring in our chest, or clues that adrenaline has been dumped into our system (dry mouth, faster heartbeat, heavy stomach shaky hands), or just a generally unpleasant feeling. Catching and identifying these feelings (along with the following steps) is a part of what Paul described as taking "*captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*" (2 Corinthians 10:5b),

and what David modeled in his questions to himself: “*Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?*” (Ps 42:5a, 11a; 43:5a). Our first step toward appropriate response is to realize, “I’m feeling frustrated,” or “I’m feeling confused,” or “I’m feeling afraid.” And if we’re feeling angry, it’s likely that just beneath the surface of (and just prior to) the anger, we were feeling one or more of four things: frustration, fear, hurt and/or shame. (See www.freemin.org for more on this.) A clear identification of our feeling is the first step toward a godly response to it.

b) Acknowledge and understand the cause of the feelings, along with the “story” we’ve told ourselves. Once we’ve identified what we’re feeling, the next step is important but usually not difficult. We need to trace the thread of actions or events, along with the “story” that led to the feeling. After an event takes place, we tell ourselves a “story” that makes sense of the facts (the event or words). In order to understand “Why did this happen?” we take the facts and add to them what *motive* was likely behind the actions or words. This happens so quickly we usually don’t realize it, yet our feelings reflect not only the facts of the case, but also our response to the motives we connect with those facts. The story you choose will determine your emotional response.

Sometimes when we identify the words or situations that inspired our feelings, we don’t understand why these things would trigger such a strong reaction within us. When our emotional response seems out of proportion to the trigger, that’s usually a sign we would benefit from some form of wholeness prayer. (For more information on wholeness prayer, see www.freemin.org or Module Li3. Overcoming Sin and Stuck Places.)

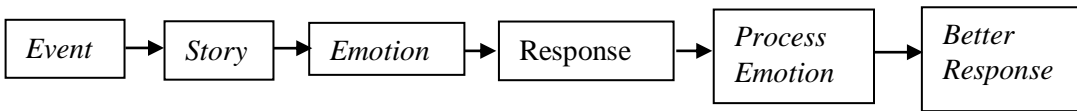
c) Surrender the cause and the feelings (along with related people and events) to the Lord. As with so many things in our lives, the turning point comes when we forbid our old nature to grab control, and instead give control to the Lord, acknowledging the work of his sovereign hand, and inviting him to show us *his* perspective on the situation.

d) Ask the Lord to help us distinguish between the facts and our “story,” and show us if there’s another “story” or motive that’s possible. Our interpretation may *feel* like the only one possible in the situation, but we need to distinguish actual facts from motives and interpretations that we’ve added. We also need the Lord to show us additional information we haven’t noticed - about ourselves, others, and the situation.

e) Receive the Lord’s perspective and ask for His help. Having asked the Lord to show us his perspective, we need to quiet our hearts and minds, and attune our spiritual ears to listen to what he would convey to us. This will often come in the form of a verse of Scripture, a biblical truth, or an impression consistent with the spirit of Christ and the truth of his Word. As the Lord brings us fresh perspective, we can ask for his help to know how to respond to the event, in a way that will reflect the beauty of Christ and the truths of his Kingdom.

f) Consider an appropriate response, consistent with God’s best. Sometimes a right response will become clear in a flash of insight; other times it will take shape through what could best be described as a discussion of the subject with the Lord. Once we determine a response consistent with the Lord’s way, all that remains is to take the step of responding. In difficult cases, we may want to add a “wrap-up” prayer: “Lord, help me to do what you’ve just shown me, and to do it well, for your glory.”

These are the basic steps to processing emotions. Sometimes, it may seem we've begun the process too late. We've already reacted, and only later realize that our frustration has gotten the best of us. It's not too late to take redemptive action. In these cases, we could diagram the process as follows:



One part of the appropriate response might be to go back and apologize (in a culturally appropriate way) or repair damage that has been done. It's never too late to become more Christlike, and sometimes our humility in acknowledging a fault will be a counter-cultural surprise that will spark people's attention in a positive way.

It might seem like working through this processing of emotions would take a long time - the kind of time we don't have to spare in the midst of many situations that inspire anger, fear, and frustration. At first, this process does usually take some time, and can best be done when you're alone and have some quiet minutes with the Lord to concentrate (like an end-of-the-day debriefing with the Lord, or a substantial quiet time anticipating the challenges of a new day). But as with so many disciplines, the habit that you start slowly, working through it step by step, eventually becomes a natural pattern that happens quickly and easily.

It's like learning to play an instrument. At first, it seems to take forever, But when the foundation is well laid, the pattern begins to flow almost automatically.

Reflection Questions

1. Think of a situation where someone irritated you. Apply the six steps above to process your emotions and check your story.
2. What are the action steps the Lord wants you to take related to processing your emotions?
3. Brainstorm various types of conflict. For each, consider:
 - What false accusations might run through someone's head in this situation?
 - What might be some *good* parts or helpful information about the other person's perspective that someone could easily miss in this situation?
 - What might be some wrong goals in the situation?
 - What might be some good secondary goals in the situation?

Living in the Path of Peace – Part 4

Steps to overcoming conflict

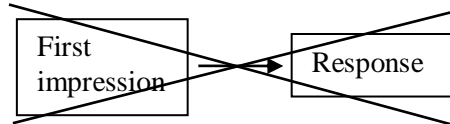
The Way Out of Conflict (Steps 2-4).

2. Dialogue God's Way

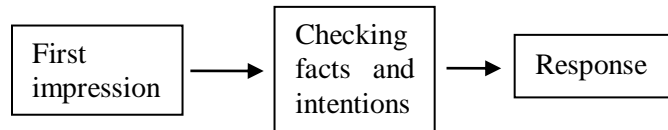
Talk with the person or people involved, with the following purposes:

A. Check the facts of the situation. (Prov 18:13).

In a polite tone: "Do you mean "ABC?"



*"A fool shows his annoyance at once.."
(Prov 12:16)*

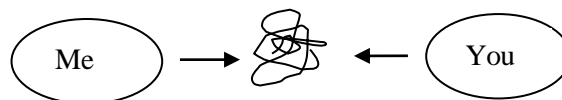


"He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame" (Psalm 18:13).

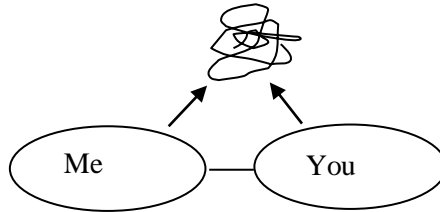
- B. State your commitment to overcome the problem in a way that's consistent with Jesus' love.
- C. Try to see the situation from the other person's perspective: how does it look and feel to them? Listen first, and give feedback to see if you're getting it right!
- D. Talk through the issues, speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Try to determine the cause of the conflict, without making accusations.
- E. Apologize for any fault, problem, or weakness on your part – however small.
- F. Value people as God does. A loving relationship is more important than the problem itself. "What's more important – you or getting my way?" This is the big question in a lot of marriages. Idea for married people: Tell your spouse that they're more important to you than anything else in this world, including anything you ever argue about.

Note: if you're dealing with a major sin (needing to be handled according to Matt 18:15-17), the relationship could be at stake. But even in correcting sin, our motivation should be love, from beginning end – even when breaking of a relationship for the sake of discipline is necessary.

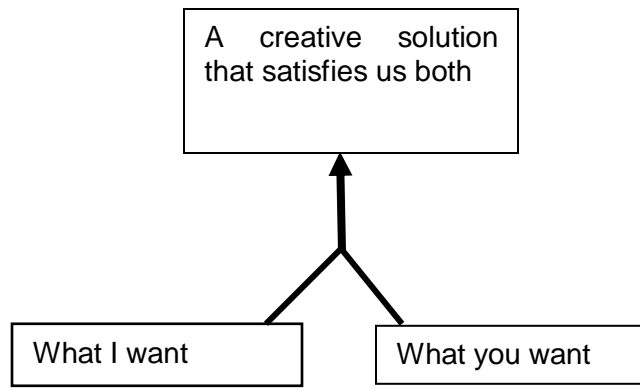
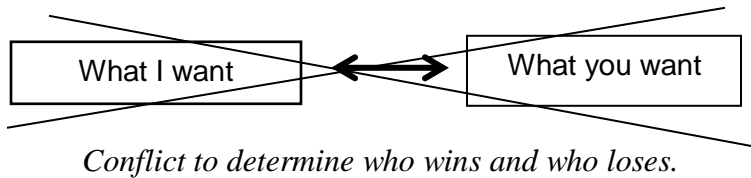
Unhealthy Pattern:
The Problem is Between Us



Healthy Pattern:
We Work Together to Overcome the Problem



G. Look for creative "win-win" solutions. Avoid "sucker's choices" (win-lose).



Creative solution: We both win.

H. If needed, find a mediator - when you've made a try without a mediator, and it's not going well. (If it's clearly a sin issue, this is where bringing in others is needed.)

3. Forgive as God Commands (from the heart) (© Freedom for the Captives Ministries. Used with permission. For more information, see www.freemin.org.)

1) We must forgive others from our hearts (Matthew 18:21-35).

- a) What are indicators that you have fully forgiven someone?
 - i) You have compassion on them.
 - ii) You don't say negative things about them.
 - iii) You can freely bless them.
 - iv) You're free from all bitterness, anger, resentment, hate, and/or rage toward them.
 - v) You don't accuse, blame or judge them.
 - vi) You don't seek repayment or revenge.
 - vii) You let go of the offense.
- b) What are indicators that you have *not* fully forgiven someone?

- i) You feel negatively about them.
 - ii) You say negative things about them.
 - iii) You curse them.
 - iv) You feel bitterness, anger, resentment, hate, and/or rage toward them.
 - v) You accuse, blame or judge them.
 - vi) You want repayment or revenge.
 - vii) You hold onto the offense.
- 2) Forgiving someone means releasing the offenses and the results of those offenses to God. It doesn't mean that what the person did was right, or that they should be trusted.
 - 3) 3 steps related to forgiving someone:
 - a) Bind and cast out evil spirits
 - b) Forgive the sin
 - c) Receive the person.
 - 4) Follow-up step: Pray a blessing on the person

4. Release All into God's Hands

A. Release people and situations into God's sovereign hand, and then go on your way rejoicing.

Here's an example: "You know, I can't believe how often the elders let Fred do the children's sermon. Granted, he's funny, and sometimes he has good things to say. But it always seems like he's showing off, and trying to bring attention to himself. And a lot of times, the point he's making is some really basic thing. It's entertaining, but there's not really any substance to it. Now I may not be the greatest speaker, but at least I try to have something solid when I get up to do the children's sermon. It really ticks me off to see Fred up there week after week. What message is that sending to our kids, when we have somebody up there showing off? Lord, what do you think about that? What do you mean, who am I to judge another man's servant? Do you mean you *like* the way Fred acts? Oh. You're willing to use imperfect people? And that includes me? OK. Lord, I thank you for the amount of truth there is in Fred's children's sermons. And thank you for making Fred an entertaining communicator. I pray you'll bless him in that ministry and bless our children with all that you want them to learn about you and your ways. I thank you that you are the sovereign Lord of the church. I release all these things and my own feelings into your hands. Move among us, Lord, for your glory.

In the face of people acting from false motives and trying to stir up trouble for him, Paul says, "The important thing is... And because of this I rejoice." Surrender the outcome.

B. Do everything you can do to bring God's blessing to those involved in the conflict. Do good to them and pray God will bless them.

Summary. Two important questions to ask:

1. **"Is it worth it?"** Is it worth the extra effort it will take me to resolve conflicts in ways that are more in line with God's best?
2. **"Can I do it?"** With God as my helper, can I grow in resolving conflicts in ways that are in line with God's best? Will I choose to do this? Who can I ask for help if I get stuck?

Reflection Questions

1. Choose a conflict you are experiencing or have experienced in the past. Talk to God about it and in your own mind, practice steps A-F in step 2 above.
2. Pray for someone with whom you've had conflict. Ask God what you could do to be a blessing to them. Write down your ideas.
3. Pray and write about
 - highlights of what you've learned from these modules
 - application steps (Reminder of follow-up for married people: tell your spouse that they're more important to you than anything else in this world, including anything you ever argue about.)
 - any remaining questions you would like to discuss with someone.
4. Ask God what things may need to change within you to apply the principles in this seminar. For each of the things that would need to change, ask yourself and God these two questions:
 - **“Is it worth it?”** Is it worth the extra effort it will take to resolve conflicts in ways that are more in line with God's best? (Yes, maybe, probably not, absolutely!)
 - **“Can I do it?”** With God as my helper, can I grow in these ways? (Phil 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”) Do I choose to do this? Who can I ask for help if I get stuck?

5. Prayer of Commitment. *Take time to read through this prayer and consider whether its words reflect what you want to say. If this is a commitment you would like to make, sign on the line at the bottom of this page, as a token of commitment between you and the Lord.*

Lord, I want to be filled with the wisdom from above, that is pure, peaceloving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit.

Any conflicts that arise I want to face together with you, in the love and truth of Jesus. Thank you for the teachings of your Word, so that the path to resolving conflict can become clearer in each situation.

I commit myself now: I am willing to obey your Word in addressing any conflicts that arise. I reject carnal ways, worldly short-cuts, and all the devil's schemes – all that is contrary to your good plan. I want to reflect the character of Christ and receive every challenge and conflict as an opportunity to be purified. I surrender my personality and my ministry into your hand. You are able to defend and shape me toward perfection, until I am fully conformed to the person of Jesus and the path of your Word.

May the power of your Spirit, who is present as I make this commitment, give me strength and faith to carry it out in every situation you allow, for the advancement of your glorious kingdom.

Name _____ Date _____

For further reading and growth:

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when Stakes are High, by Kerry Patterson, et al. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002

The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict, by Ken Sande, 3rd ed.. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004

Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Finding Peace With God, Yourself and Others, by Neil T. Anderson and Charles Mylander, Regal Books (July 2002)