

# Restoring Relationships Through Conflict Resolution

*“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.”  
Matthew 5:9*

*“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”  
Roman 12:18*

Conflict.

Conflict is part of life. We can't avoid conflict. Especially with people. Conflict is inevitable and is seldom, if ever, enjoyable. For most of us, the word conflict stirs up all kinds of negative memories and painful emotions.

Conflict happens and conflict hurts.

What do you think about and how do you feel when you hear the word conflict?

I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- **Relational conflict causes us the most pain because LIFE IS RELATIONSHIPS.**

*Jesus Christ taught us that life is all about relationships with God, ourselves and others. The Lord commanded us to love God, love ourselves, and love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). Jesus, the Master at loving God and people, experienced extensive, extreme conflict during His earthly life. Through His personal example and His Word, Jesus showed us how to resolve our conflicts and restore our relationships damaged by conflict.*

- **Conflict resolution is a critical key to restoring estranged relationships.**

*Unresolved conflict does more to damage healthy relationships than almost anything else. Ongoing, unsolved, unresolved problems with another person slowly but surely eat away at the very foundation and fabric of healthy, mutually-satisfying*

relationships. Strained relationships remain broken, unhealed and unhealthy when conflicts continue without resolution.

- **Conflict resolution requires that those in conflict with each other do everything they can on their part to resolve the conflict and be a peace with one another.**

A conflict free life is idealistic and impossible. *It is a fact that conflict happens. But conflict can be resolved.*

Resolving conflict and peacemaking was a kingdom priority for Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught the beatitudes, principles and truths that would bring blessing and joy to life. In verse 9, Jesus declared that blessed (happy, O how happy) are the peacemakers. Why? Because they shall be called sons of God.

Being a peacemaker is a characteristic of sonship with our Heavenly Father. God made peace with us through Christ (Ephesians 2:8-22). As God's sons, we are Christlike when we seek to make peace and resolve conflict with people.

The Apostle Paul in Romans 12:18 exhorts Christians to do all they can from their perspective to be at peace with all men. *Realistically, as much as we can, where possible, we are encouraged to resolve conflict with others and strive to live in peace with family, friends, fellow Christians and neighbors.*

## **Spiritual Conflict**

Before we address conflict between people, we must understand that there is a conflict behind all conflict.

**It is called spiritual warfare.**

Paul informs and alerts us concerning the source and essence of spiritual conflict.

*“For our struggle (conflict) is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* Ephesians 6:12

*“For though we walk according to the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”*

10:3-5

- **Man's ultimate conflict is not with man. It is with the devil and his demonic agents.**

We are at war with Satan and evil spiritual forces in heavenly places. Behind the cosmic curtain of our human conflicts, a fierce spiritual battle rages for the souls of men. Destruction of mankind is the evil one's primary objective.

- **One of Satan's strategies for destroying people is to destroy their relationships.**

Conflict. Confusion. Contentions. Miscommunication. Accusations. Offenses. Disagreements. Disharmony. Dissension. Disharmony. Betrayals. These are offensive weapons in the devil's dastardly (despicably mean and cowardly!) arsenal that he skillfully deploys to disrupt and destroy our relationships with people we care about.

As a liar, thief and murderer, the devil is a divider and destroyer of unity, peace and love that healthy relationships produce. Satan's chief goal is to destroy man's faith in God and faith in his fellow man.

- **Satan is always picking a fight with us and wants us to pick fights with one another.**

As committed Christians, our first and foremost focus while witnessing for Jesus Christ is fighting the devil. Standing firm in faith, fully-equipped with the whole spiritual armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20), we battle the evil one in the name of Jesus who defeated the devil (I John 4:4, 5:4).

God resolved His and our conflict with Satan when the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from dead! (I Corinthians 15:55-58). Once and for all, for time and eternity, Jesus broke the devil's grip on mankind. The enslaving power of sin, death and the grave was made null and void. Satan was stripped of his power (Colossians 2:13-15) and sentenced to spend eternity in Hell.

- **Satan is beaten, but he is a sore loser. While he waits to be cast into the lake of eternal fire, he does all he can to hurt human relationships.**

In order to resolve conflict with people, we have to recognize that Satan is always doing all he can to block resolution and restoration. It is imperative that Christians take proper authority over the devil by agreeing to bind him and to set loose heaven's help in resolving conflict and restoring relationships (Matthew 18:18-20).

- **Even when in disagreement, Christians must agree to fight the devil together, and stop fighting one another.**

As Christians, we must never lose sight of the fact that we have an adversary who fights against us. If Satan can divide and conquer Christians through relational conflict, he wins. He loses when we live in peace with each other and resolve our conflicts

## **Common Causes of Human Conflict**

What is the source of conflict between people? James provides the answer.

*“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. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.”* *James 4:1-2*

**The source of human conflict is selfishness.** Note James addresses our pleasures, lust and envy that wage war inside of us. Instead of asking God for our legitimate needs to be met by Him, we fight and quarrel with others to take what they have for ourselves. Hence, conflict. Warring parties are self-centered, looking out for themselves, not the other person.

Author and mediator Ken Sande comments in his book *The PeaceMaker* “When someone opposes or mistreats me, my instinctive reaction is to devote all my energy to defending myself and defeating my opponent. This self-absorbed attitude usually leads to further problems. When I follow my feelings, I am likely to make impulsive decisions that often offend my opponent and make matters worse.”

When people are conflicted with one another, they believe there is only one possible outcome: I have to win! No matter what, at all costs, I must vanquish my foe. Beating and defeating my adversary is vindication that my way was right indeed.

That is a bunch of wishful bologna and unholy hogwash!

- **Conflict is won when it is resolved and relationships are restored.**

*Scriptural conflict resolution is a win-win proposition. Everybody wins when conflicts are resolved and relationships are restored.*

Resolving conflict begins with understanding some of the common causes of relational conflict.

#### A. **SIN** causes **CONFLICT**

Sin causes conflict because the essence of sin is selfishness. Sin wants its way, not God's way, and certainly not another man's way. Because "*All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory*" (Romans 3:23), conflict is inevitable as self-centered sinners exert their selfish wills on others.

➤ *Sinner + Sinner = Sinful Conflict!*

#### B. **PRIDE** causes **CONFLICT**

Arrogance is the foundation of sin. Man's pride exalts itself against his Creator and fellow creatures. A man's pride, when it clashes with another person's pride, can only produce conflict. Conflict resolution demands a humble spirit if relationships are to be restored (Proverbs 16:18, I Peter 5:5-6).

➤ *Pride always precedes the fall of healthy relationships.*

#### C. **OFFENSE** causes **CONFLICT**

Jesus said offenses (stumbling blocks) would come and woe to the offenders! (Matthew 18:7). Proverbs 18:19 states "*A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.*"

Isn't it amazing how easily you and I can take offense? We sinful human beings come equipped with offense radar! Offenses cause people to stumble over one another and fall into a stressed, estranged relationship. As the Word says, it is rather difficult to win back a brother who is offended. But not entirely impossible.

➤ *Offenses can be overcome through conflict resolution.*

#### D. **UNREALISTIC, UNREALIZED EXPECTATIONS** cause **CONFLICT**

Everyone has expectations. Personal expectations are not always on the same page as other people's! When we hold expectations of others that are either unrealistic or unrealized, or both, conflict can raise its ugly head.

*Most unrealistic and unrealized expectations are unexpressed. If people don't know what we expect, and don't know how to fulfill our expectations, how can anything but conflict occur?*

➤ *Expectations can clash and cause conflict.*

#### E. **MISCOMMUNICATION** causes **CONFLICT**

Communication is a wonderful thing when it happens because it promotes understanding and cooperation. Miscommunication produces misunderstanding and conflict instead of cooperation. It is frustrating to be misunderstood. And it is doubly frustrating for misunderstanding from miscommunication to result in conflict.

➤ *Conflict can be resolved and relationships can be restored when people communicate with each other.*

#### F. **CONTROL AND INFLEXIBILITY** causes **CONFLICT**

Desire to control people and outcomes coupled with an unwillingness to surrender control sets people up for conflict. Controllers clash with others who wish to control the situation too! When we refuse to budge and concede some control to others, conflict is certain. Compromise, and meeting in the middle, is foreign territory to controllers.

➤ *Having to control outcomes creates a climate for conflict.*

#### G. **DISAGREEMENT** causes **CONFLICT**

We humans want people to agree with us. The problem is that we don't always see eye to eye. People are often on different pages. We all have personal agendas that we promote and push. Disagreement disrupts relationships by pitting people against one another. "My way" verses "your way" (and "or hit the highway") becomes a divisive issue that fractures friendships and sours healthy relationships.

➤ *Agreeing to disagree is an on-ramp to the road of conflict resolution.*

#### H. **UNFORGIVENESS** causes **CONFLICT**

Forgiveness is a necessary part of conflict resolution. Unwillingness to forgive keeps conflict's fires burning.

Everyone needs forgiven. Forgiveness motivated by God's love, mercy and grace is the oil that lubricates the friction of human relationships. Conflict's wall comes crashing down when adversaries hoist the white flag and surrender to each other through forgiveness (Ephesians 4:29-32).

➤ *A spirit of unforgiveness keeps relational conflict alive and well!*

## **How Unresolved Conflict Ruins Relationships**

When people are lying on their death beds, anticipating their last breath on earth, they don't think about how much money they made, how much material stuff they accumulated, or what positions of prominence they achieved.

*Helplessly watching the sands of time relentlessly running out, people do dwell on their relationships with the people they love.* If relationships are in order, a person can slip off to eternity joyfully and peacefully. But if there is unresolved conflicts with loved ones, passing can be a tense, cold, lonely, peace-less journey.

What exactly does conflict do to estrange and possibly ruin relationships? The following things should cause us to pause and consider the state of our relationships with people. After all, none of us know if we have any time beyond today.

- **Conflict** frustrates and fractures friendships.
- **Conflict** alienates and isolates.
- **Conflict** disillusiones and discourages.
- **Conflict** fosters hurt feelings and produces harsh attitudes.
- **Conflict** breaks trust and stirs up a sense of betrayal.
- **Conflict** disrupts peace and harmony.
- **Conflict** breaks hearts and breeds bitterness.
- **Conflict** steals joy and happiness.

- **Conflict makes life with those we love plain old YUCKY!!!!**

*“Therefore, laying aside all falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.*

*Be angry, and yet do not sin; DO NOT LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON YOUR ANGER, and do not give the devil an opportunity.*

*Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.*

*Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

*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, TENDERHEARTED, FORGIVING EACH OTHER, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*

*Ephesians 4:25-32*

## **Conflict Provides Opportunity To Be Christlike**

Life is one long journey of restoration.

Because life is all about relationships, restoring and renewing personal relationships is life’s priority. Relationships are dynamic, never static. Therefore, relationships can become hurtful and unhealthy from time to time. Restoration and renewal turns unhealthy relationships into healthy ones.

Restoring relationships involves bringing people back together, mending broken hearts, clearing up misunderstandings, forgiving and forgetting faults, agreeing to grant a new beginning and moving forward in a mature manner.

Conflict can bring out the worst and best in us.

**For Christians, conflict resolution tests our Christ-likeness. If you really want to know how much your life looks like the life of Jesus, and how spiritually mature you really are, observe how you handle conflict.**



To be Christian is to be a “little Christ” who acts like Jesus and treats people the way He does. Successful conflict resolution requires the presence and power of Christ working in and through His people who are attempting to resolve the conflict.

In the three following scriptural scenarios, we see Jesus helping precious people for whom He ultimately laid down His life, resolve their conflicts with sin, self-esteem, estranged family relationships, religious opinion, community conflict and their relationship with their Heavenly Father.

\* **A wayward son** (*Luke 15:11-32*)

\* **An adulterous woman** (*John 8:1-11*)

\* **A brokenhearted disciple** (*John 21:1-17*)

- Jesus **VALUED** people.
  - *How much value do you put on people and your relationships with them?*
  
- Jesus **LOVED** people.
  - *Do you really love people the way Jesus loves people?*
  
- Jesus **SERVED** people.
  - *What does serving people mean to you?*
  
- Jesus **FORGAVE** people.
  - *Can you forgive those who may or may not forgive you?*
  
- Jesus **RESTORED** people.
  - *Is restoration of relationships a top priority for you?*

Relationships were highly important to Jesus. If we want to be like Him, healthy relationships must be important to us. Important enough to resolve conflict and be reconciled with others when our relationships are unhealthy.

## How To Resolve Conflict

Max Lucado has said “Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.”

Conflict does not have to be combative, but conflict must be confronted to be conquered.

Few, if any of us, likes conflict or enjoys confrontation. Paul’s exhortation to “*speak the truth in love*” (Ephesians 4:15) is sound advice to follow when seeking to restore broken relationships through conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution is a PROCESS.

Resolution of conflicts and reconciliation of relationships doesn’t happen in a moment. Resolution and restoration is a specific process requiring specific scriptural steps over a period of time.

The Bible provides examples of conflict resolution as models for resolving our relational conflicts.

* Joseph and brothers	Genesis 37-50
* Jacob and Esau	Genesis 27-33
* Benevolent Ministry	Acts 6
1-7 * Paul and John Mark	Acts 15:36-40, II
Timothy 4:11	
* Euodia and Syntche	Philippians 4:1-3
* The Church Council At Jerusalem	Acts 15:1-35
* The Church At Corinth	I Corinthians 1:10-11

In each of these situations, the opposing parties reconciled their differences and were restored to one another.

Three courses of pro-active conduct on our part can contribute immensely to restoring relationships that have been hurt through conflict.

# I. Do Your Part To GET The Relationship Right

## Step One

1:5

### *Go to God to seek His wisdom*

James

- Talk to God before talking to men.
- Lord, what would you have me to do to reach out to resolve this conflict? I ask you for Your wisdom and how to apply it in this situation.

## Step Two

### *Go to the person to seek reconciliation*

Matthew 5:23-24

- Reconciliation means *to resolve, to restore to friendship or harmony*.
- Reconciliation precedes restoration.
- Be proactive. You take the first step toward them. Make an appointment to see them. Get up and physically go to the person. Do not expect them to come to you. You be the initiator of resolution and reconciliation.

## Step Three

### *Go with a humble spirit*

I Peter 5:5, Proverbs 18:12

- Humility paves the way for healing.
- Confess and forsake all pride toward this person. Approach the other party with a humble demeanor, a gentle spirit and a soft voice. Do not be condescending or condemning.

## Step Four

### *Go with a willingness to forgive the person*

Ephesians 4:32

- Forgive because you have been forgiven.

- Determine in your heart beforehand that you will forgive this person in the same manner that God has forgiven you in Jesus Christ. Be willing to wipe the slate clean between you two. Put their sin against you under the blood of Christ. Leave it there.

### Step Five

#### *Overlook the offense*

Proverbs 19:11

- Mend the fence of offense.
- Negotiate your differences.
- Stop focusing on the problem. Be solution focused. Refuse to hold the offense against you any longer. Discuss and negotiate your differences without becoming offended. Don't bring up the offense again.

### Step Six

#### *Give the benefit of the doubt*

I Corinthians 13:7

- Cut the person some slack. You do not have all the facts, so do not judge.
- Try to understand where they are coming from. Put yourself in their shoes.
- Wouldn't you want the benefit of the doubt?

## II. Do Your Part To MAKE The Relationship Right

### Step Seven

#### *Confess your faults and failure in the relationship* James 5:16.

Matthew 7:1-5

- Confession is good for both souls involved!
- Take the lead. Confess your shortcomings in the relationship. Admit your errors and mistakes. You be responsible for you.
- It takes courage and humility to admit our faults and failures.
- Big people who travel the high road of life take responsibility for their personal conduct. They correct bad behavior.

- Confession of our faults makes it easier for others to confess their faults.

## Step Eight

*Apologize and ask for forgiveness*                      Matthew 18:21-35

- Sincere sorrow for sin opens hearts.
- Be transparent. Genuine and serious, not phony and flippant. Name your sin/offense. Call it what it is. Don't try to cover it up or make it look less than it is. Sincerely apologize. Ask for forgiveness like this: Would you please forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_?

## Step Nine

*Receive and grant forgiveness*                      Genesis 33:4, 45:15  
Ephesians 4:32, Acts 7:60

- BIG PEOPLE are FORGIVERS!
- Forgive as you want to be forgiven. Receive their request for forgiveness with a merciful and gracious spirit. Respond to them "I forgive you for \_\_\_\_\_ and I do not hold this against you."

## Step Ten

*Make restitution where possible*                      Exodus 22:3-15

- Restitution is *restoring something to its rightful owner*.
- Ask God and the person how you can make this wrong right. Who else do you need to apologize to? How can you restore this person's reputation that has been damaged by your conflict with them? What do you need to do to completely clear the air of this matter?

## Step Eleven

*Be reconciled with your brother*                      Matthew 5:23-24

- Real reconciliation is your goal.
- Have someone mediate if necessary.
- Reach out to each other with warmth and tenderness. Shake hands, pat each other on the back or give each other a hug if appropriate. Make a

commitment to stay committed to being friends in good standing. Agree to move forward in your relationship.

### III. Do Your Part To **KEEP** The Relationship Right

#### Step Twelve

*Stay up to date in your relationship* Proverbs 27:23

- Keep your healthy relationship healthy.
- Communicate often. Meet regularly to nurture your friendship and fellowship. Keep on top of how your relationship is going. Don't be afraid to ask "how are we doing at this time in our relationship?"

#### Step Thirteen

*Put relationship fires out before they burn out of control*

- Prevention really is worth more than a pound of cure!
- Do not allow little things to become big things. If something isn't right, nip the problem in the bud as soon as possible. Leave room for both of you to make future mistakes. Just don't let mistakes burn the house down. Correct mistakes as they occur. Resolve differences right away and do not allow offenses to erect fences between your hearts.

#### Step Fourteen

*Depend on God's grace to grow your relationship*

- Continual growth is God's goal for healthy relationships.
- Ask God what you can do to expand your relationship. How can you help keep the relationship healthy and maturing? Look to God for His love to flow through you to this person. Enjoy journeying through life together.

**Resources for resolving relational conflict: Ken Sande, Resolving Everyday Conflict and The Peacemaker.**

## Conflict Resolution Through Church Discipline

Jesus knew the church would have **people problems** that needed resolved. He gave the disciples a three step plan for church discipline (correction and restoration). If churches would faithfully follow this pattern, the body of Christ would be more successful in restoring relationships between church members.

### The First Step

*“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.”*  
*Matthew 18:15*

#### ➤ **REPROVE IN PRIVATE.**

- Purpose of reproof is to reconcile and restore.
- If he listens, you win your brother back!
- If he doesn't listen, proceed to step number two.

### The Second Step

*“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.”*  
*Matthew 18:16*

#### ➤ **REPROVE IN PRIVATE WITH WITNESSES.**

- Power of persuasion through witnesses.
- If he listens, you win your brother back.
- If he doesn't listen, proceed to step three.

### The Third Step

*“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 tax gatherer.”*

*Matthew 18:17*

#### ➤ **IF PRIVATE REPROOF FAILS, MAKE IT PUBLIC.**

- Take the matter to the church body.

- If he listens, you win your brother.
- If he doesn't, you release him to the world.

Church leaders and committed members are responsible and accountable to uphold this biblical blueprint for church discipline set forth by the head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Church Discipline That Worked**

Pastor Paul dealt with a church discipline issue in I Corinthians 5. A man in the body of Christ had been immoral (verse 1). The church body did not deal with the situation properly (verse 2). Paul stepped in to exercise appropriate discipline (verses 3-5). His purpose for removing the immoral man from the fellowship was that the man's spirit would be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus after having been beaten up in the flesh by Satan (verse 5).

Paul's hoped-for outcome for the serious discipline was twofold. First, the ultimate salvation of the sinful brother and restoration to the church. Second, for the church body to humble themselves to God's Word and cleanse themselves of this evil in their midst (verses 6-8). The church members were instructed not to associate with this man while the devil worked his flesh over (verse 9-13).

### **The man was removed.**

Now for the rest of the story. In II Corinthians 2:1-8, Paul writes to the Corinthians and asks them to "*reaffirm your love for him*". Who were they to reaffirm their love for? The immoral man who had been removed from the church for discipline. Through the discipline process, the man bore his sorrow, repented of sin, cleaned up his lifestyle and was now ready to be restored to the fellowship.

*Paul declares it is time to take the brother back into fellowship. The formerly errant man paid the price for his sin and was now ready for a new beginning. It is time for the church family to forgive and restore their brother to fellowship.*

### **The man was restored.**

Can you imagine what it must have been like the first Lord's Day that the spiritually renewed brother was warmly welcomed and fully restored to fellowship at the first church in Corinth? Talk about having church! The church was acting like a church of Jesus Christ. Discipline worked!

### **The church rejoiced and gave thanks to the Lord!**



## **Do We Really Love Our Fellow Christians?**

*Our problem in the church is that we don't love our brothers and sisters in Christ enough to have the courage to confront them (John 13:34-35). We often fall short of God's restoring love when it comes time to reaffirm our love for fallen brothers who desire to come home to the church family.*

*This scriptural example of restoration is a tremendous encouragement to the body of Christ to motivate us make the effort to resolve conflicts and restore relationships.*

**Church discipline will work if God's people will work it right!**

*Though discipline is difficult, the fruit is sweet when the disciplined person responds favorably! So be it Lord in the church today.*

**Resolving Conflict And Restoring Relationships Is Always God's Will  
For His People**

**Steve Roll  
Restoration Ministries**