

CONFLICT RESOLUTION WORK SHEET

Introduction

Conflict is a regular part of human relationships. This is confirmed by the fact that Jesus taught what we should do if we hurt someone else (Matthew 5:23-24) or if someone does something against us (Matthew 18:15). It is also confirmed by the fact that Paul and Barnabas even parted ways, disagreeing over what to do with John Mark on Paul's second missionary trip (Acts 15:36-41). Too often disagreements lead to people dividing from and hurting each other even further. Most of us swing back and forth from being peace fakers to peace takers. The Bible, however, offers very clear and effective teaching on how to approach conflict with others. There are four key principles, four steps we must take in conflict, if we are to be a peacemaker.¹ This sheet is the most effective when you fill it out and then discuss it with someone else. Remember not to share with someone else details about the situation (such as the name of the person with whom you are in conflict, if that is possible). See Proverbs 17:9; 26:20.

First, we must realize conflict is an opportunity to...

Glorify God.

Glorifying God is the ultimate purpose of mankind. (1 Cor. 10:31) When God changes our lives through His grace the results bring honor to him. (Mt. 5:16) All of this means that when conflict arises, it is an opportunity to put God's life-changing grace on display. Most people do not work out their differences well. When, by God's grace, we face conflict head-on, it puts on display what God can do through us. When we remember this, it transforms how we face these hard times in relationships, helping us to face them rather than run from them. It also reminds us to pray for God's help. (Matthew 7:7-11; John 15:7)

List the ways resolution to your current conflict could bring glory to God. What actions on your part might glorify God?

¹ These are taken from the book by Ken Sande, The Peacemaker. See also his web site hispeace.org. We regularly offer classes on the peacemaking process.

In James 4:1-10 we learn that all-out division often arises from our protecting gods other than the true God, gods we believe those opposing us are threatening, and the only way we can pursue peace is by trusting in God for his grace to stop this. Read this passage and then list some ways God may want you to change your thinking or behavior in relation to the conflict you now face.

Our next step is to...

Get the log out of your own eye.

This phrase comes from Mt.7:3-5: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ...First take the log out of your own eye...." Before we go and communicate to someone how we believe they have hurt or offended us, this passage urges us to: (1) Ask how I might have contributed to the problem? (2) Communicate to the person how I have contributed to the problem and, if applicable, ask for forgiveness. Doing these two things not only may decrease in our mind the part the other person played while increasing our part; it also may lead them to be more receptive to what we have to say.

Read James 3:2-12; 4:11-12; and then list the ways you have contributed to the current conflict.

List the words or actions for which you must apologize to the other person(s).

When we have done this work well, we are now ready to...

Gently Restore.

Once we have wrestled with what our part in the conflict has been, if there is still a need to communicate to the other person their part in the differences, do so with grace and gentleness (Eph. 4:29, 32; 2 Tim. 2:24-26) and with the purpose of restoring your relationship so that, if needed, you can help restore the person in their walk with Christ (Mt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1). As you do this, speak the truth in and motivated by love (Eph. 4:15; 1 John 4:8). We must remember that as the family of Jesus Christ, we are to treat each other as brothers and sisters—thus caring enough not to look the other way when a fellow Christian is self-destructing and/or dishonoring God (2 Thes. 3:15) Here are the seven A’s to remember when you gently restore (especially as it relates to what you need to admit and the things for which you must apologize as listed from the previous step):

- (1) Address everyone involved.
- (2) Avoid “if,” “but,” and “maybe”.
- (3) Admit specifically.
- (4) Apologize.
- (5) Accept the consequences.
- (6) Alter your behavior.
- (7) Ask for forgiveness.

In addition to things you must apologize for, what are some things you need to communicate to the other person (keeping in mind the just-mentioned seven principles)? In other words, how do you perceive they have hurt you? Seek to word these in such a way they are not accusing. Rather, state how the other person’s actions have made you feel (e.g.: “When you said this____, this is how it felt to me,” rather than, “You were so horrible when you said ____.”):

Read James 3:13-18 and answer these two questions: (1) Where does wisdom to deal with conflict come from and what implications does this have for this current conflict? (2) In what ways am I listening to anti-biblical wisdom from self or others and which parts of this wisdom do I need to reject?²

We have one more step to take and that is...

Go and be reconciled.

Once you have worked things out with the other person, forgive them (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; James 4:11-12). This is a mark of those who are true believers (Matthew 6:14-15). If you cannot reconcile with the person and/or they are unwilling to talk to you, then get others involved to help (Matthew 18:16-20). There are four promises you can make which are helpful in forgiving another person:

- (1) I will not think about this incident any more.
- (2) I will not bring this incident up and use it against you.
- (3) I will not talk to others about this incident.
- (4) I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

² See the Appendix for a summary of biblical teachings related to conflict resolution.

For what specifically will you forgive the other person(s)?

What other specific steps do you need to take in order to reconcile?

Read James 4:13-17; 1 Peter 2:23, two passages which teach that in order to love others, especially when it is hard, we must trust in God. Then list the ways you need to trust God so that you can love and forgive the other person(s) with whom you are in conflict.

APPENDIX

The following is a list of basic and very important biblical teachings on how to deal with conflict (along with ways we often make excuses why we don't need to follow God's wisdom).

Whenever you face differences with others to the degree you struggle with reconciling and/or you find yourself unable to stop thinking about it, let these guide you in remembering what God would have you do. Also, by his grace don't give into the impulses to ignore him!

- The Bible teaches that if you have wronged someone, you are to go to them and "be reconciled" (Mt. 5:23-24). Instead, you think, "It's probably just your imagination that the person has been offended and you would feel foolish approaching them and finding out you are wrong. So, it's best just to give it some time. Maybe it will go away."
- The Bible teaches that if someone has sinned against you, you are to go and talk to them (Mt. 18:15). But, that person hurt you. You conclude, "It is probably not safe to go and it probably wouldn't do any good anyway." So, you don't go. After all, "No one else would in this situation!"
- The Bible teaches that it is best not to repeat to a person what one of their friends said about them that could be hurtful (Proverbs 17:9). Yet, you think to yourself, "I would want to know if it were me. Besides, I just can't keep this under my hat. That's too much to ask (so you convince yourself). As a result, you tell the person what their friend said, driving a wedge between them.
- The Bible teaches that it is best to meet angry words with a calm response that is not harsh (Pr. 15:1). But, given what they said, you feel you are justified in answering back in a strong manner. After all, "I can't let that kind of wrong behavior go unchecked! That itself would be wrong." So, you "give it back to them!"
- The Bible teaches that we are not to believe accusations against someone unless there are at least two or three witnesses and more are better (Dt. 19:15-20). But, so many people at your school believe the accusations, they must be true. So, though there were no witnesses to what your friend allegedly did, you decide she is guilty. After all, everyone else would think "I approve of what allegedly was done, if she were guilty of the accusation and I ignored it!" Besides, you don't want to be out-of-step with the majority.
- The Bible teaches that when we are truly loving another person with biblical love, we will give them the benefit of the doubt when there are differences (1 Cor. 13:7). In other words, we will not automatically ascribe evil motives to them, but will instead, seek to clarify what is going on and why they said or did what they did. But, come on, "You just don't know what all he has done to me in the past! I just know that I can't trust what he said!"
- Finally, remember the glorious good news of what Jesus Christ has done and continues to do in us, the gospel by which we are saved and strengthened (Romans 1:16; 16:25). On the one hand, it reminds us we are new people who can follow God and deal with conflict differently than we previously have (2 Corinthians 5:17). On the other hand, when we fail and sin in conflict, we also are assured God's grace in Christ is sufficient to pick us up that we can apologize, keep moving forward, and pursue peace (Romans 5:20; James 4:6; 1 John 2:1-2).