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The Counseling and Coaching Series

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A PERSONAL NOTE

from Mike Lindell

My passion is to see people recover from addiction! And that's why I'm proud to partner with author June Hunt and Hope for the Heart, and so excited to use the *Keys for Living* as part of the Lindell Recovery Network. People everywhere are struggling with addictions, wounds, and challenges in life. They need hope. They need help. And the *Keys for Living* provide that hope and real answers from God's Word.

This is the best material I've seen in biblical counseling and caregiving . . . with over 100 topics that speak to almost every presenting problem. There's nothing else like them. They take God's Word and apply it to life's challenges.

The *Keys for Living* are exceptional and outstanding resources for those who need help in overcoming the obstacles they face, and above all, to find Christ.

Read this book. Share it with others. Ask God in prayer to make it real in your life.

May God bless you as you do it!



Mike Lindell

Lindell Recovery Network

INTRODUCTION

Are you afraid of conflict? In your vocabulary, does the word *conflict* spell: t-r-o-u-b-l-e?

When you hear the word conflict, what do you picture? A fighting family? A feuding friendship?

I'll have to admit, when I hear the word conflict, my natural tendency is to do anything to avoid it! Yet as I think about the serious conflicts I've had in my life—my most difficult relationships—I see times of greater personal growth than if the conflicts had not existed.

And because of these difficult relationships, I became aware of lessons I needed to learn, not only about others, but more importantly, about needed changes in my own attitudes and actions. Had everything been peaceful, I honestly do not believe I would have stretched my ways of thinking or changed as I needed to change.

Years ago I heard this insightful statement, “Never to be angry, never to disagree at all seems to most of us a sign not of love but of indifference.”

We, obviously, live in a world of differences. You are not identical to anyone. Your background, even within your family, will be different from a brother or a sister because you are in a different birth order. Even if you were an identical twin, you would have been born with a different temperament. People would interact with you differently. Inevitably, you would have differences of opinion.

And, of course, these differing opinions are the breeding ground for conflict. Be aware, if you are an avoider of conflict (like I have been), that will also bring on conflict. So if we can't avoid conflict, what are we to do?

The answer is not to be an avoider—a *peace-at-any-price* person—to let people have their way. (I've changed from this—I really, really have!) Neither is the answer to be an attacker, to have it my way. The solution is not retreating or reacting but rather responding to conflict appropriately.

When you are faced with conflict, passivity is not the path to peace.

Conflict resolution lies in reaching out to your opposer with the love of Christ. D.L. Moody, the famous evangelist, once said, “I have never yet known the spirit of God to work where the Lord’s people were divided.”

Why is this important? Because the Lord wants you to live with right relationships, experience personal growth, and display that deepest peace—the peace that passes all understanding.

My prayer is that the Lord will help you handle your conflicts with His wisdom and peace, and that, most of all, you will become the person He created you to be.

June Hunt
Founder, Hope For The Heart

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Solving Your People Problems

Gather two or more people together and you can have a montage of differing personalities, priorities, perceptions, and preferences—a concoction ripe for fascinating conversations but also for formidable *conflict*. Rather than hands shaking in agreement, the result can be fingers pointing in accusation. Welcome words of blessing can be replaced by caustic words of bitterness.

From the very beginning, the first people God created—Adam and Eve and their offspring—experienced conflict. The Bible clearly shows that all who came after them certainly experienced conflict. All through the ages and even today, similar struggles continue to occur anywhere and everywhere people gather. Who hasn't at times wanted to throw their hands up in the air and exclaim, "Why can't we all just get along?" Well, we can—when we live with pure hearts and pure motives and pure principles. The Word of God provides principles for peace that can result in lasting reconciliation and resolution. One of those principles is . . .

"Encourage one another and build each other up."

(1 THESSALONIANS 5:11)

DEFINITIONS



*“Conflicts can be used
to accomplish
God’s purpose.”*



Living in obscurity as a Jewish orphan, she seems the least likely candidate to be the mediator—the *only* mediator—to save her people from sure destruction. However, the Lord knows her heart. He knows that Esther will face the most critical conflict of her life with complete humility and total confidence in His provision.

The conflict arises because a conniving official in the king’s court named Haman devises a plot to murder all the Jewish people in the empire. His fury has been flamed by a man who refuses to bow down to him—namely, Esther’s cousin Mordecai, who has raised her. Little does Esther know she will carry the fate of the Jewish people on her shoulders as she faces and seeks to resolve a conflict of epic proportions. Yet Mordecai aptly poses this thought-provoking question:

*“Who knows but that you have come to your royal position
for such a time as this?”*

(ESTHER 4:14)

How does young, obscure Esther become involved in this critical conflict? The book of Esther recounts her story. After days of feasting, King Ahasuerus (King Xerxes) is “*in high spirits from wine*” (Esther 1:10), and he wants to show off the stunning beauty of his wife before the people and nobles. He sends seven attendants to summon her; however, Queen Vashti does the unthinkable and refuses to come. The king is furious because of her refusal and his advisors feel action has to be taken—otherwise . . .

“There will be no end of disrespect and discord.”

(ESTHER 1:18)

Heeding the advice of his closest counselors, the king immediately issues a royal decree: Queen Vashti can never again enter into the king’s presence, and she will be replaced (Esther 1:19). With this new edict, the outward conflict between the king and queen appears to be “resolved.” But the resolution of one conflict gives rise to another—now the king has no queen.

What Is a Conflict?

Throughout the kingdom, a major search ensues to find a distinguished queen for the disgruntled king. All the beautiful young virgins in the land are rounded up so that “*the young woman who pleases the king*” can be selected as queen (Esther 2:4). Esther, described as a young woman who “*had a lovely figure and was beautiful*” (Esther 2:7), quickly gains favor. At cousin Mordecai’s instruction, she does not reveal her heritage. Meanwhile, wise Mordecai saves the king’s life by reporting an assassination plot against him. The event is recorded in the annals of the king.

After a full year of preparation and pampering, Esther finally stands before the king, who “*was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women . . . and made her queen instead of Vashti*” (Esther 2:17).

Esther’s feet are now firmly planted on the path of God’s divine purpose. But she’s also on a collision course with a colossal conflict, a challenge far greater than replacing a dishonored queen.

Conflicts are disagreements, struggles, or battles over opposing issues or principles.¹

Conflictus, the Latin word, means an “act of striking together” or clashing with.²

Conflict, in the letters of Paul, is often presented by using forms of the Greek word *agon*, from which the English word “agony” developed.³

Originally used to describe a gathering of spectators for the Greek athletic games, this word changed over time to refer to various types of conflict and became a metaphor in the New Testament to describe spiritual conflict, intense labor, or trial.⁴ The apostle Paul said, “*I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally*” (Colossians 2:1).

What Is the Difference between Resolution and Reconciliation?

Soon a personal power struggle begins when corrupt Haman, the top royal official, becomes infuriated with Mordecai, who day after day refuses to bow down to him when Haman passes by the royal gate. When he discovers Mordecai is a Jew, he manipulates the king to order an official decree mandating the massacre of all the Jews—every man, woman, and child. Haman thinks he has won the conflict, but he will never get the homage his insatiable ego pursues. In fact, he will pay for his actions at a very high and *horrific* cost.

*“When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down
or pay him honor, he was enraged.
Yet having learned who Mordecai’s people were,
he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai.
Instead Haman looked for a way
to destroy all Mordecai’s people,
the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.”*
(ESTHER 3:5–6)

Once the king’s decree is pronounced throughout the provinces, the fate of the Jewish people seems doomed. No constructive conflict resolution is in sight. However, Mordecai appeals to Esther for help, and she can’t believe what Mordecai asks her to do—approach the king unannounced and uninvited! He knows the law: *“Any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter”* (Esther 4:11).

Since Esther has not been summoned by the king for 30 days, how can she go to the king to plead on behalf of her people? What if the king becomes displeased with her? Clearly, going to the king will mean putting her life on the line, to which Mordecai responds that her life is on the line anyway.

*“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house
you alone of all the Jews will escape.”*

(ESTHER 4:13)

Resolution vs. Reconciliation

Resolution and reconciliation are different. . . .

Resolution means finding the answer or analyzing a complex notion into simpler ideas.

Reconciliation means 100% restoration to harmony, to bring together again.⁵

Some differences may never be resolved, but you can still be reconciled to those with whom you differ. At other times, resolution of differences may be possible, but reconciliation may be inappropriate, such as in cases of unrepentant abuse, adultery, or cult entrapment. God requires only that, as much as it is possible, you seek to be at peace with everyone.

*“Make every effort to live in peace
with everyone and to be holy;
without holiness no one will see the Lord.”*

(HEBREWS 12:14)

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Question: “Is forgiveness the same as reconciliation?”

Answer: No. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.

- Forgiveness focuses on the offense; reconciliation focuses on the relationship.
- Forgiveness requires no relationship, while reconciliation requires nurturing a relationship—two people, in agreement, walking together toward the same goal.

The Bible asks . . .

*“Do two walk together unless
they have agreed to do so?”*
(AMOS 3:3)

What Are Some Different Types of Conflict?

Suddenly, Esther faces an *inner conflict* just as heavy, just as grave, and just as deadly as the *outer conflict* caused by Haman.

On multiple levels, Esther has a conflicted soul. Where will she find the strength, the courage, to do what needs to be done . . . what *must* be done? This verse could apply to Esther’s critical situation:

*“Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.”*
(HABAKKUK 1:3)

1. Intrapersonal Conflict⁶

A struggle within a person to decide *between two or more choices*.

- Does Esther approach the king in an attempt to save the Jewish people from annihilation—which could earn her a death sentence—or does she remain silent and take her chances of being spared since she is now queen? She has no illusions about the risk.

“All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king” (ESTHER 4:11).

2. Interpersonal Conflict

A clash of ideas or interests *between two or more people*.

- In the book of Esther, malicious Haman plots to have Mordecai murdered only because Mordecai refuses to bow down to him.

“When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged” (ESTHER 3:5).

3. Intraorganizational Conflict

A competitive or opposing action *within a group* (a family, department, church, political party, state, or nation)

- In the book of Esther, the king’s chief noble and the king’s queen are on a collision course that will cost one of them dearly. One of them will die—not by the hand of an outsider, but by the order of their own king (Esther 4:11). The king becomes enraged after realizing that Haman has manipulated him into issuing a death sentence to murder all the Jewish people.

“The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life” (ESTHER 7:7).

4. Interorganizational Conflict

A battle or opposing action *between two or more groups* (families, companies, religions, or countries).

- In the book of Esther, because of Haman’s surreptitious plot, the Persian nation threatens to annihilate the entire Jewish population—men, women, and children.

“Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods” (ESTHER 3:13).

Conflict fills the pages in the book of Esther just as conflict abounds in many lives. Disharmony in the home, wars in the workplace, the “should I” or “shouldn’t I” struggles—they all test us and ought to lead us to the one to whom Esther will turn for the strength, courage, and

resolution she needs. His name isn't even mentioned in the entire book of Esther, but His sovereignty spreads itself like a shadow over every chapter. The Bible tells us that . . .

*"Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign
LORD comes escape from death."
(PSALM 68:20)*

Who Creates Conflict and Who Keeps It Going?

Drastic times call for drastic measures.

Esther asks Mordecai to gather all of the Jews in Susa, one of the empire's main capitals, and has them go three entire days without food and drink. She and her maids do the same. Esther enlists the people of God to fast and to pray for rescue, for a resolution to the most formidable conflict of her life.

*"Go, gather together all the Jews
who are in Susa, and fast for me.
Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day.
I and my attendants will fast as you do.
When this is done, I will go to the king,
even though it is against the law.
And if I perish, I perish."
(ESTHER 4:16)*

Esther's act of faith works to open the king's heart. She approaches him without having been summoned, and he extends to her the golden scepter of grace, granting her an audience. When he inquires about the unannounced visit, the queen makes her request. Queen Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet, and the king seems eager to fulfill her wishes. Haman is convinced that he is included in the invitation because he has the queen's favor.

*“Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. . . .
Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife,
Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth,
his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him
and how he had elevated him above
the other nobles and officials. . . .
‘I’m the only person Queen Esther invited
to accompany the king to the banquet she gave.
And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow.’”*
(ESTHER 5:9–12)

Little does Haman know that on this fateful day someone will be honored, but that someone won’t be him!

At the advice of his wife and friends, Haman orders a gallows 50 cubits high (75 feet) to be built, on which he intends to have Mordecai hanged. But while Haman’s workmen are busily building, the king has a sleepless night and orders that the book of memorable deeds during his reign be read to him. Found within its pages is the account of Mordecai’s heroism in saving the king’s life.

The following morning, Haman arrives at the palace intending to top off his enjoyment of the banquet with manipulating the king to agree to his request to have Mordecai hanged, but the king first asks Haman . . . *“What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?”* (Esther 6:6).

Confident the king must be referring to him, Haman proposes placing royal robes and a crown on the man and having a noble official lead him on one of the king’s horses through the city square, proclaiming, *“This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!”* (Esther 6:9).

While Haman is indeed part of the king’s plan, his role is *beside* the horse, not *on* it! Humiliated, Haman leads Mordecai, mounted on a steed, through the city streets for all to see. Entirely mortified by his enemy Mordecai, Haman returns home after the public spectacle.

There he receives from his wife and friends a message, not of hope, but of doom: *“Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!”* (Esther 6:13).

Aggressive Attackers and Passive Avoiders

Those who create conflict and those who keep it going can generally be divided into two groups—attackers and avoiders.

3 Aggressive Attackers⁷

1. Wolves

Wolves are fierce, savage, and cruel animals that make a terrible howling sound and attack even large animals. They possess immense stamina to travel long distances. They use scent markings to claim their territory, communicating: “This territory is occupied. This territory is mine!”

The word *wolf* is also used in reference to people who are:

- Known to be “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” They cloak their harmful intentions behind a harmless facade
- Known to be forward, direct, and zealous in the seduction of women
- Known to “wolf” down food, eating greedily—devouring their food like prey

The Bible describes the destruction wolves can cause:

“Her officials within her are like wolves tearing their prey; they shed blood and kill people to make unjust gain” (EZEKIEL 22:27).

2. Snakes/Serpents/Vipers

These are creeping creatures that can also move rapidly. Although many snakes are harmless, they are most often feared for their hissing, rattling, biting, and striking. They inflict burning pain and cause inflammation where they bite. Considered cunning and subtle, they can also be malicious and deadly poisonous.

The word *serpent* is also used in reference to people who are:

- Known to be dangerous and treacherous
- Known to inject injurious venom into people or groups by poisoning their minds, hearts, or reputation
- Known to act silently, secretly, and slanderously to inflict injury on others

The Bible describes the destructive nature of serpents:

“They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent’s; the poison of vipers is on their lips” (PSALM 140:3).

3. Hornets

Hornets are any of the larger social wasps that can bite and sting at the same time. Just one hornet can mobilize an entire nest to sting aggressively. In a swarm, they can drive cattle and horses to madness, and their formidable stings can also kill human beings.

The word *hornet* is also used in reference to people who are:

- Known to be excessively angry or “mad as a hornet”
- Known to gather others to “swarm” a person or place, thus creating havoc or harm with “stings” (for example, accusations, threats, attacks, etc.)
- Known to build a “hornet’s nest” of angry, assaulting people who can literally be deadly

The Bible depicts their devastating ability in this description:

“I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow” (JOSHUA 24:12).

3 Passive Avoiders⁸

1. Tortoises

Tortoises are protected by large, dome-shaped shells that are difficult for predators to crack. They withdraw their necks into their shells by folding them under their spines or folding their necks to the side. Tortoises possess excellent nighttime vision but

poor daytime vision because of their color blindness. They have short, sturdy feet and are famous for moving slowly, partly because of their heavy shells, but also because of their relatively inefficient, sprawling gait.

The word *tortoise* (or *turtle*) is also used in reference to people who are:

- Known for being slow or for being stragglers
- Known for “withdrawing into a shell” when threatened
- Known for dawdling or shirking responsibility

The Bible states this about lizards, which includes tortoises: “*These are unclean for you . . . any kind of great lizard*” (LEVITICUS 11:29).

2. Chameleons

Chameleons can change to a variety of colors—brown, green, blue, yellow, red, black, or white—in response to temperature, light, and mood. A calm chameleon can be green, but when angry, it can turn yellow. Chameleons possess elongated tongues that can be up to twice the length of their bodies. Their eyes move independently of each other, giving them sharp, stereoscopic vision and depth perception.

The word *chameleon* is also used in reference to people who are:

- Known to change their minds or their character, but only superficially, merely to be expedient
- Known for their quick or frequent changes, especially in appearance in order to “fit in”
- Known to blend in with diverse groups by reflecting each group’s look, behavior, and belief when with the group

The Bible states, “*These are unclean for you . . . the chameleon*” (LEVITICUS 11:29–30).

3. Weasels

Weasels have a reputation for cleverness and guile, especially as they perform a “hypnotic dance” in front of their prey. These small, furry animals can twist and burrow down into small holes. They produce a thick, oily, powerful-smelling liquid called musk, used for scent marking and defense.

The word *weasel* is also used in reference to people who are:

- Known to act deviously, unscrupulously, and underhandedly
- Known to use “weasel words” in order to be evasive or insincere
- Known to evade or escape from a situation by “weaseling out” of it

The Bible states, “*These are unclean for you; the weasel . . .*”
(LEVITICUS 11:29).

What Is God’s Heart on Conflict Resolution?

During the second feast the next day, at the king’s urging, Queen Esther finally makes her request for her people to be spared from annihilation by the crafty *snake*, Haman. Not only does the king grant her request, but in his rage he has Haman hanged on the very gallows Haman had built for Mordecai. Haman is indeed elevated, but not in the way he expected! Instead of remaining in power to see the destruction of the Jewish people, Haman had a “sudden drop and a short stop” from grace with the king.

After a time of great conflict, true resolution resonates throughout the land for the Jewish people. If Esther had avoided the conflict (retracting from trouble like a *turtle*), she would not be recognized today as a national heroine and choice servant of God. Instead, she confronted the conflict and rose to the occasion “*for such a time as this*” (Esther 4:14). The Bible says . . .

*“There is a time for everything . . .
a time to be silent and a time to speak.”*
(ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 7)

Indeed, the story of Esther teaches . . .

Conflicts can be used to accomplish God’s purpose.

Only after becoming queen was Esther able to save the Jewish nation.

Esther 4:14—*“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”*

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (ROMANS 8:28).

Conflicts cannot always be avoided.⁹

Esther and the Jewish people could not escape Haman’s threats.

Esther 4:13—*“He sent back this answer: ‘Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape.’”*

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (JOHN 16:33).

Conflicts that are resolved require advance preparation and planning.

At Esther’s direction, the Jews fasted before she planned to willingly go before the king on behalf of the Jews.

Esther 4:16—*“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”*

“The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty” (PROVERBS 21:5).

Conflicts are not necessarily bad—they can actually sharpen us if we respond correctly.¹⁰ Handled well, they provide an opportunity for role modeling.

For centuries, Esther has been and continues to be a role model of how to make an appeal to a higher authority.

Esther 5:7–8—*“Esther replied, ‘My petition and my request is this: If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king’s question.’”*

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him” (JAMES 1:12).

Conflicts can sometimes be settled through negotiation.

Esther graciously negotiated with the king.

Esther 7:3–4—“Then Queen Esther answered, ‘If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.’”

“Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise” (PROVERBS 19:20).

Conflicts that are resolved require action toward peace.

Due to Esther’s intervention with the king, he took action that allowed the Jews to assemble and to defend themselves.

Esther 8:11—“The king’s edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children, and to plunder the property of their enemies.”

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (ROMANS 14:19).

An Unparalleled Appeal: The Abigail and David Story¹¹

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This conflict is ready to become a full-blown catastrophe.

David, God’s appointed heir to the throne, has acquired a sizeable army. However, this young warrior is on the run from Israel’s current ruler, jealous King Saul, who is chasing his successor through the wilderness and literally trying to kill him.

For a brief time, David and his men set up camp to guard the livestock, possessions, and workers of a wealthy hothead named Nabal. When sheep-shearing season arrives, they expect a “pay day” for the protection they offer Nabal.

That day finally arrives, and David is in a festive mood. He sends ten of his men to warmly greet Nabal, who happens to be drunk and feasting, and to ask for the well-deserved supplies in exchange for their protection. However, Nabal, known to be “surly and mean in his dealings,” (1 Samuel 25:3) is anything but festive: “Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? . . . Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?” (1 Samuel 25:10–11).

“Who is this David?” What a foolish question! Nabal knows precisely who David is. But then, the name *Nabal* literally means “fool”—and he certainly lives up to his name. In reality, his foolishness is further displayed by a lack of reverence for God.

Outraged and offended by the injustice, David with 400 of his men plans to descend upon Nabal’s household, armed to shed the blood of every male. As David embarks on the deadly

journey, Nabal's wife, Abigail, becomes aware of what has occurred. Immediately, she begins crafting a shrewd strategy to resolve the conflict.

Described as “intelligent and beautiful,” Abigail is also exceptionally wise and diplomatic. She knows she must approach David quickly to plead for mercy and forgiveness. Her first wise move is *sending a peace offering* ahead—a delectable buffet of food and wine in an effort to soften the impact of Nabal's insult. Her second sensible step is *keeping strategically silent* about her plans.

Then *demonstrating humility*, Abigail finally encounters David and bows down with her face to the ground, physically falling at his feet. Though one of the land's wealthiest and most influential women, she also humbles herself verbally. She invites David to place the blame of Nabal's arrogant affront onto her (an offer she likely realizes David will refuse to do).

Then, she asks for permission to speak. This discerning woman calls him “my lord” and refers to herself as his “*servant*.” She pleads, “Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name means Fool, and folly goes with him” (1 Samuel 25:24–25).

Some may say Abigail's unvarnished words dishonor her husband, but Scripture offers no such condemnation. Instead she clearly communicates that she understands the enormity of his offense. *Speaking the truth boldly* by neither defending nor downplaying Nabal's unacceptable behavior, Abigail skillfully defuses David's fury. (Many wives unwisely defend their husband's bad behavior, calling it loyalty. However, they completely lose credibility in the eyes of others because they blindly side with wrong, not with right.)

A student of human motivation, Abigail factors into her appeal a keen awareness of David's priorities—*establishing the true priorities*—when she reminds him, “The LORD your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the LORD's battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life... the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling” (1 Samuel 25:28–29).

Another act of wisdom is *remembering God's prior faithfulness*. Abigail's astute analogy further reminds David of how God earlier empowered him to defeat Goliath with a slingshot!

This marvelous mediator is also aware that godly character calls for *considering the long-range consequences* of one's decisions. So Abigail, *appealing to honor and reputation*, suggests that, when David becomes king someday, he won't want to have an avoidable massacre troubling his conscience: “When the LORD has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself” (1 Samuel 25:30–31).

As Abigail makes her plea, grounded in objectivity and reality, the catastrophic conflict is averted. David turns from potential assailant to praising admirer, commending Abigail for her wisdom that leads to a peaceful resolution. “May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands . . . Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request” (1 Samuel 25:33–35).

In the end, Abigail and Nabal experience two very different destinies. When Abigail tells Nabal all that transpired, “his heart failed him and he became like a stone” (1 Samuel 25:37). Ten days later, God strikes him dead.

When David hears the news, he understands that the Lord has acknowledged his right response. “Praise be to the LORD who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal’s wrongdoing down on his own head” (1 Samuel 25:39).

David’s recognition that slaying Nabal in a fit of rage would have been “wrong” demonstrates just how beneficial Abigail’s intervention has been—not only for her own household, but for David as well. And it reminds David of God’s ability to protect and defend him from his enemies—a timely testimony, given David’s status as an innocent fugitive from murderous King Saul.

The unforgettable example of Abigail and David shows us how practicing biblical principles can resolve even the most serious conflict. Through her astute employment of initiative, truth, humility, and diplomacy, Abigail provides a powerful lesson on how to transform a mortal enemy into a merciful ally.



CHARACTERISTICS



*“Each of us begins
to develop a style
of handling conflict
at an early age.”*



For 20 years they tussle, their relationship rumbles with turmoil and conflict.

Jacob has fled to his uncle Laban’s home after deceiving Isaac, Jacob’s aged and blind father, into bestowing upon him the birthright blessing of the firstborn. When Jacob’s older brother, Esau, finds out about it, he vows to kill him. Laban graciously receives Jacob into his home, but before long the tables are turned and Jacob himself becomes a victim of repeated deception.

The first incident involves Laban’s daughters, Leah and Rachel, and a honeymoon hoax. Jacob is deeply in love with Rachel, and he has worked seven years to gain her hand in marriage. But when he wakes up the morning after his wedding night, he doesn’t behold the face of his beloved—it’s Leah’s face he sees!

The command of God is very clear . . .

“Do not deceive one another.
(LEVITICUS 19:11)

What Are Common Statements Used in Conflict?

Jacob is stunned and angered by Laban’s deception, fooling him into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. He says to Laban, *“What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?”* (Genesis 29:25). Laban justifies his behavior in accordance with a local custom, one that calls for the marrying of the eldest daughter before the youngest. But after the bridal week is finished with Leah, Laban vows to give Jacob Rachel as well, yet he will have to work for him another seven years.

Jacob marries Rachel, and the future patriarch finds himself with two brides in seven days. Laban will soon pull another “switch out” on Jacob, but this time it will involve goats and sheep.

The following verse aptly applies to Laban:

*“Not a word from their mouth can be trusted;
their heart is filled with malice.”*

(PSALM 5:9)

Attackers and Avoiders

8 Faulty Accusations of Attackers

- “You’ll never change.”
- “You challenge me, and I’ll pin you to the wall.”
- “You don’t have what it takes to succeed in life.”
- “You failed again—you’re just a failure.”
- “You’re at fault if our relationship fails.”
- “You can’t even do the simplest things correctly.”
- “You’re hopeless—there’s no hope for you.”
- “You’re so stupid that you don’t have enough sense to get out of the rain.”

Instead of focusing on the faults of others (out of pride), the Bible tells us to bear the burdens of others (out of humility): *“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves”* (Galatians 6:2–3).

8 Faulty Expectations of Avoiders

- “You should never create conflict in our relationship.”
- “You should never get angry with me because I can’t handle it.”
- “You should always see things my way if you care about my feelings.”
- “You should always do things my way if you care about my happiness.”

- “You should always trust my judgment if you respect me.”
- “You should always depend on me to make you secure.”
- “You should always overlook my mistakes if you truly accept me.”
- “You should always seek to meet my needs if you want us to have a good relationship.”

However, the Bible says we should look to the Lord to meet our needs: *“my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19).

What Is the Appearance of Attackers and Avoiders?

Laban is a wolf among his own sheep and goats, separating the off-colored animals designated for Jacob in hopes of reducing the odds of Jacob’s acquiring a large herd.

The off-colored animals that Laban deceitfully hides are supposed to be Jacob’s wages, but it’s not the first time the dastardly uncle has bilked his nephew over finances. Laban has previously cheated Jacob concerning his pay ten times.

But prosperity is in God’s hands, not Laban’s. Despite his uncle’s deceit, Jacob, a shepherd experienced in selective breeding, gets the other sheep and goats in Laban’s herd to mate and they bear young that are *“streaked or speckled or spotted”* (Genesis 30:39). Laban originally thinks he’s outwitted Jacob, but Jacob *“grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys”* (Genesis 30:43).

Laban could be included in Paul’s audience:

*“You yourselves cheat and do wrong,
and you do this to your brothers and sisters.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 6:8)

Each of us begins to develop a style of handling conflict at an early age. Our personal ways of “fighting” come from our natural instinct, personality, and early family dynamics. Yet, many of us are unable to defuse conflict because we are repeating the extreme patterns of childhood, either *attacking* or *avoiding* others.¹²

Considering the characteristics of the six creatures mentioned earlier will help define the personalities of attackers and avoiders. The problem with both styles is that neither strategy appropriates the grace that is available to a child of God. The Bible says . . .

*“See to it that no one falls short
of the grace of God
and that no bitter root grows up
to cause trouble and defile many.”*
(HEBREWS 12:15)

3 Aggressive Attackers

1. The Wolf¹³ alias, “dictator”

This person demands absolute power, insisting on complete autocratic control.

- Authoritative, seeks to control everyone and everything
- Combative, judges the actions and motives of others
- Rigid, refuses to listen to opposing opinions with an open mind
- Disrespectful, uses criticism to cut people down
- Aggressive, engages in power plays

Message: “Give in to me or I’ll attack you!”

Goal: To feel powerful

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (MATTHEW 7:15).

2. The Snake¹⁴ alias, “backbiter”

This person says mean or spiteful things behind another person’s back.

- Strikes when you're not looking
- Uses criticism and put-downs
- Starts false rumors with false accusations
- Pretends to have done nothing wrong
- Gathers allies by distorting the truth

Message: "Don't cross me or you'll regret it later."

Goal: To feel superior

"You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (MATTHEW 12:34).

3. The Hornet¹⁵ alias, "faultfinder"

This person nags others with persistent questions, petty suggestions, and constant criticism.

- Registers repeated complaints
- Makes negative statements about everything
- Blames others
- Pulls others into disagreements
- Delights in misery

Message: "Don't get on my bad side or I'll talk about you!"

Goal: To feel valuable

"The mouths of fools are their undoing, and their lips are a snare to their very lives" (PROVERBS 18:7).

3 Passive Avoiders

4. The Turtle¹⁶ alias, "retreater"

This person withdraws from what is perceived as difficult, dangerous, or disagreeable.

- Plays dumb
- Gives one-word answers
- Withdraws from conflicts

- Seeks secrecy
- Tries to make you feel guilty for asking appropriate questions

Message: “Don’t confront me because it won’t do any good.”

Goal: To feel safe

“But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved” (HEBREWS 10:39).

5. The Chameleon¹⁷alias, “people pleaser”

This person fears displeasing others and will change anything and everything in order to please.

- Avoids making decisions
- Acts innocent when in the wrong
- Appears nice and agreeable
- Recoils from making a commitment
- Downplays differences

Message: “I’m nice to you; you owe it to me to be nice in return.”

Goal: To feel accepted

“Fear of man will prove to be a snare” (PROVERBS 29:25).

6. The Weasel¹⁸ alias, “twister”

This person perverts meanings, squirms, is devious, and uses gimmicks.

- Uses clever defenses
- Sidesteps the issue
- Twists and bends the truth
- Blames others
- Avoids taking responsibility or ownership of problems

Message: “I’m not going to get pinned down.”

Goal: To feel confident

“One whose heart is corrupt does not prosper; one whose tongue is perverse falls into trouble” (PROVERBS 17:20).

What Styles of Conflict Are Found in Scripture and Who Displays Them?

After years of conflict, Laban, the aggressive attacker, and Jacob, the passive avoider, find resolution through a covenant.

They gather a bunch of stones and place them in a pile as a memorial to the oath the two men will share.

Laban then says to Jacob: *“This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me (Genesis 31:52).*

The uncle and nephew find a peaceable solution to their conflicts, and the Bible does not reference any more struggles between them. The men are obedient to the call of God’s Word:

“Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”

(PSALM 34:14)

Given the thousands of narratives throughout the Bible, even the novice reader sees that negative conflict has been “alive and well” from the beginning of time. For example, Abraham, on two different occasions, lies about his relationship with Sarah, his wife, by passing her off as his sister. Because of her beauty, he fears two different monarchs will kill him in order to take her. Because of his fear, Abraham acts like a *turtle* hiding in its shell:

*“Abraham replied, ‘I said to myself,
“There is surely no fear of God in this place,
and they will kill me because of my wife.”*

*Besides, she really is my sister,
the daughter of my father though not
of my mother; and she became my wife.*

And when God had me wander from my father’s household,

*I said to her, “This is how you can show your love to me:
Everywhere we go, say of me, ‘He is my brother.’””*

(GENESIS 20:11–13)

Which type of *attacker* or *avoider* is each of the following people? Analyze and identify the negative conflict styles in each of the following relationships. (Note: Read the passage first, then fill in the blanks. Answers are found at the end of this section.)

Relationship #1 Between the Serpent, Adam, and Eve

The Serpent: He is an attacker, a *snake*. He plays the part of himself!

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman [Eve], ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden?”’” (GENESIS 3:1).

Adam: He is an avoider, a *weasel*. He tried to *weasel* out of accepting responsibility for his wrong choices by blaming Eve.

“The man [Adam] said, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it!’” (GENESIS 3:12).

Eve: _____

“Then the LORD God said to the woman [Eve], ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate!’” (GENESIS 3:13).

Relationship #2 Cain toward Abel

Cain: _____

“Now Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let’s go out to the field.’ While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him” (GENESIS 4:8).

Relationship #3 Between the Philistines, Delilah, and Samson

The Philistines: _____

“The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, ‘See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver’” (JUDGES 16:5).

Delilah: _____

“Then she said to him, ‘How can you say, “I love you,” when you won’t confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.’ With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it” (JUDGES 16:15–16).

Samson: _____

“So he told her everything. ‘No razor has ever been used on my head,’ he said, ‘because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother’s womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man’” (JUDGES 16:17).

Relationship #4 King Saul toward David

King Saul: _____

“He [Saul] raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, ‘I will pin David to the wall.’ But David evaded him twice” (1 SAMUEL 18:10–11 ESV).

Relationship #5 King David toward Bathsheba

King David: _____

“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says . . . ‘Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own’” (2 SAMUEL 12:7, 9–10).

Relationship #6 The Pharisees toward Jesus

Pharisees: _____

“Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples . . . ‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. . . . You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?’” (MATTHEW 23:1, 13, 33).

Relationship #7 Pilate toward Jesus

Pilate: _____

“On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time” (LUKE 23:6–7).

Relationship #8 Judas toward Jesus

Judas: _____

“Judas Iscariot . . . asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?’ So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver” (MATTHEW 26:14–15).

Relationship #9 Martha toward Jesus

Martha: _____

“But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’” (LUKE 10:40).

Relationship #10 Peter toward Jesus

Peter: _____

“Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. ‘You also were with Jesus of Galilee,’ she said. But he denied it before them all. ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, ‘This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ He denied it again, with an oath: ‘I don’t know the man!’ After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, ‘Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.’ Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know the man!’ Immediately a rooster crowed” (MATTHEW 26:69–74).

ANSWERS to Who Displays Which Style of Conflict?

Eve: She is an avoider—a *weasel*.

- She tried to weasel out of accepting responsibility for her wrong choices by blaming the serpent.

Cain: He is an attacker—a *wolf*.

- He became angry and killed his brother when God chastised him regarding his offering.

The Philistines: They are attackers—*wolves*.

- They were predators waiting to conquer their prey, Samson.

Delilah: She is an attacker—a *snake*.

- She accepted a bribe from the Philistines to trap Samson.

Samson: He is an avoider—a *chameleon*.

- He told the secret of his strength just to please Delilah.

King Saul: He is an attacker—a *wolf*.

- He was jealous of David.

King David: He is an avoider—a *turtle*.

- He sought to keep his affair with Bathsheba a secret from her husband, Uriah.

The Pharisees: They are attackers—*snakes*.

- They sought to control everyone with laws. They accused Jesus of blasphemy.

Pilate: He is an avoider—a *chameleon*.

- He knew Jesus was innocent, yet condemned Him to death to please the crowd.

Judas: He is an attacker—a *snake*.

- He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Martha: She is an attacker—a *hornet*.

- She complained to Jesus about her sister, Mary.

Peter: He is an avoider—a *turtle*.

- He denied ever knowing Jesus.

The History of Dueling: The Aaron Burr Story¹⁹

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Today it seems so inconceivable, uncivilized! Yet for a long time, many considered it the “gentlemen’s way” to settle differences.

Dueling was all about men defending their honor. From the Roman Empire through the Renaissance to the late 1800s, dueling laws containing specific codes of honor were officially sanctioned. A European document known as the *Code Duello* detailed 25 official rules that governed the one-on-one potentially deadly contest. (The number of rules varied from place to place: the Irish Code contained 25, whereas the French Code, 84.) Then in 1838, South Carolina Governor John Lyde Wilson developed an American version of the code.²⁰

The man being challenged to duel was typically approached by a “second,” a person who served as an intermediary who tried to resolve the conflict peacefully. With the grievance communicated to the single person who offended the challenger, and with the site of the duel established, if the man who was challenged apologized publicly to the offended party through the efforts of the second or if he were to make an acceptable restitution, the conflict would be resolved. But if the recipient of the challenge instead chose to duel, he would select the time and the weapons, as well as agree to a location (the field of honor) for the showdown. Accompanied by a doctor for each side, the seconds of both parties (typically three for each) would continue to seek a peaceful resolution all the way up until the last moment.²¹

Averting a duel wasn't easy, particularly in the South. Men who refused to duel were labeled cowards and their pictures were posted publicly.

Abraham Lincoln received such a challenge. Lincoln had ridiculed James Shields in an Illinois newspaper; therefore, this state auditor challenged Lincoln to a duel. Lincoln even went as far as to select both the dueling site and the sword as his weapon of choice. But then he averted the duel by apologizing to his bitter political rival. Consequently, his apology prevented the potential deadly outcome.²² This all took place prior to Lincoln's presidency, so you can imagine how the course of American history would have been altered if Lincoln had been killed!

But the duel that shocks the nation is the one between Alexander Hamilton, the United States' first Secretary of the Treasury, and Aaron Burr, vice president under Thomas Jefferson. Like Lincoln and Shields, these two have become bitter political rivals due to several heated battles.

On the morning of July 11, 1804, the two men walk onto the official dueling grounds at Weehawken, New Jersey. Both of their seconds fail to reach a peaceful resolution, so Hamilton and Burr each clutch an official .56 dueling pistol.²³ Undoubtedly both of their minds are rehearsing their sizable history of hostility, dating back to 1791 when Burr won a Senate seat previously held by Hamilton's powerful father-in-law, Philip Schuyler.

Then in 1800, Senator Burr obtains a private document written by opponent Federalist Hamilton, a paper critical of another Federalist, John Adams, who just happened to be the current second President of the United States! Burr publishes Hamilton's sensitive document, which is clearly intended to stay private. Ultimately, this public posting not only becomes embarrassing for Hamilton, but also further splinters the Federalist party.

Four years later Burr runs for governor of New York, a political move that enrages Hamilton. He certainly doesn't want his archenemy running such a powerful state, so Hamilton strongly lobbies against him. But the final straw is the fallout from a dinner conversation.

New Yorker Dr. Charles Cooper attends a dinner where Hamilton is brazenly belittling Burr, whom Dr. Cooper immensely admires. The doctor writes a letter to Hamilton's influential father-in-law criticizing his son-in-law's "despicable opinion" of Burr. All too soon, that fateful letter winds up being published in a New York newspaper.²⁴

Shortly afterwards, Burr challenges Hamilton to a duel. Each man fires a shot. Burr is unscathed, but Hamilton drops to the ground with a bullet piercing his liver and spine. He dies the next day.

While Burr had hoped a victory on the dueling field would energize his languishing political career, instead, he is charged with two counts of murder.²⁵ (By this time, dueling has been outlawed in New Jersey and New York.) Later, the charges were dropped.

Ultimately, everyone loses: Burr loses total credibility, and Hamilton loses his life. That is what happens when people refuse to resolve conflict.

So what do you do if someone insults you, slanders you, hounds you? In total truth, have you ever said, "I can't help it! If someone slaps me, I have to slap back! If someone hits me, I have to hit back. If someone strikes me, I have to strike back"? Realize that just because someone *starts* something doesn't mean you have to *finish* it. Just because people take you on doesn't mean you have to accept the challenge.

Think about Hamilton: He was challenged to a duel. He accepted the challenge and needlessly he lost his life. Did he think death wasn't a possibility? Oh, assuredly he did! For in 1801—just three years prior—his eldest son Philip had died in a duel.

God's Word is crystal clear: conflicts should be approached with a heart of peace. Romans 12:18 says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." And 1 Peter 3:9 explicitly states, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing" (1 Peter 3:9). We are then told, "To this you were called." In other words, it's a command. Why are we asked to live this way? "So that you may inherit a blessing."



CAUSES



*“We assume that
what we want is
what we need
and that it is
up to us to
defeat those
who oppose us.”*



First comes the affair, then the murder—and ultimately chaos and confusion throughout the kingdom.

David, King of Israel, is described in the Bible as a man after God’s own heart, but one very dark season is nothing short of disaster. God does forgive David for his affair with a beautiful woman named Bathsheba, and He forgives David for having her husband, Uriah, murdered so that he can take her as his wife, but there are consequences—*catastrophic* consequences—for his sinful behavior.

Through the prophet Nathan, God tells David, “*Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.*’ . . . ‘*Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you*’” (2 Samuel 12:10–11).

And God does just that.

Why Are Some People Attackers and Others Are Avoiders?

A vile deed has been committed, and Absalom vows to attack the “attacker.”

Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom, is raped by their half-brother Amnon, and Absalom’s heart becomes filled with hate. King David, their father, is furious over the twisted and tragic family scenario but avoids legal conflict and does not have Amnon punished as prescribed by the law.

For Absalom, there is only one misguided course for conflict resolution—*kill Amnon*—which is precisely what he has his trusted men do two years later. Absalom flees and David is overwhelmed with grief concerning the death of his firstborn, but David’s continued role as an avoider prompts Absalom to resume the role of an attacker. How different their relationship might have been if only David had reflected the heart of God and reached out to resolve the conflict between himself and Absalom.

*“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you,
live at peace with everyone.”*
(ROMANS 12:18)

Everyone has it, no one wants it, and no one can escape it! What is *it*? One common denominator for us all is *conflict*. But where does this conflict come from? People act the way they act as a result of a combination of factors. The Bible says . . .

“Whoever loves a quarrel loves sin.”
(PROVERBS 17:19)

Natural temperament or personality types

- You were born with a natural bent toward being outgoing or reserved, compliant or defiant, aggressive or passive.
- Your temperament or personality traits can work to your advantage or disadvantage depending on whether you learn to use them productively in resolving conflicts or destructively in creating conflicts.

“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:5).

Early childhood experiences

- You were deeply influenced by your early family relationships through words you heard and behaviors you saw, which gave you messages about who you are and what you do and how to respond to conflict.
- You can change the assumptions you adopted about yourself and about conflict resolution that influence your behavior today. Identify the messages you received growing up in your family and evaluate whether they are helpful or harmful.

“Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good” (JOB 34:4).

Cognitive factors

- Your thoughts lean toward a fight or flight response when conflict arises—“I have to attack, overcome, win this argument” (fight) or “I have to get away, avoid this, find safety” (flight).

- You can learn new ways of thinking to properly handle conflict. Then, when a conflict arises, you can identify the problematic thoughts and shift your focus to something that is productive and beneficial.

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).

Learned behaviors

- You may have *unintentionally* learned negative ways of responding to conflict from the negative people in your life, especially those who are attackers or avoiders.
- You can also *intentionally* “unlearn” negative patterns by learning new behaviors, including learning from those who embrace conflict as a fact of life and who find ways of productively resolving it.

“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance” (PROVERBS 1:5).

What Goals Drive Attackers and Avoiders?

Absalom is away from his home, Jerusalem, for three years, and there isn’t a single overture from his father, King David.

The dismissive, devastating abandonment churns Absalom’s emotions into a chaotic concoction of bitterness, anger, and rebellion. The heat turns up when an official of Israel prompts David to send for Absalom, and upon his return David refuses to see him for two years. The king’s instructions: *“He must go to his own house; he must not see my face”* (2 Samuel 14:24).

As an attacker, Absalom’s foremost goal is to feel significant to his father, but that goal is thoroughly thwarted with David’s avoidance of him. The king, on the other hand, manifests a classic goal of an avoider—to feel safe. Rather than responsibly confronting Absalom, David chooses to withdraw like a turtle, to wall himself off emotionally from his estranged son.

Both men would have benefitted from this promise of God's Word:

*"The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs . . ."*

(ISAIAH 58:11)

Unmet goals become the driving force behind why we act the way we do when we are faced with a conflict. The challenge, of course, is to find a way to get our legitimate goals and needs met legitimately . . . rather than illegitimately. This can be accomplished through a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible says . . .

*"His divine power has given to us all things
that pertain to life and godliness,
through the knowledge of Him
who called us by glory and virtue."*

(2 PETER 1:3 NKJV)

Attackers Feel Insignificant

Wolves have a goal to feel *powerful*.

- Children who grow up feeling insignificant within their families typically become driven by the need to feel significant. This drive can result in finding destructive ways of meeting this need.
- Children who feel powerless can develop aggressive tactics to overpower others. These wolves become fiercely competitive in order to feel like true winners. They become dictatorial in order to feel powerful. Thus, their need to feel significant is met—temporarily.

Serpents have a goal to feel *superior*.

- Children who grow up experiencing “put-downs” regularly and are the target of belittling comments may become driven by the need to overcome feelings of inferiority.

- Children who feel inferior can become behind-the-scene backbiters. These serpents spread poisonous rumors in order to feel superior to others—temporarily.

Hornets have a goal to feel *valuable*.

- Children who grow up being told that “children are to be seen but not heard” or whose opinions and feelings were discounted can become driven by the need to feel valuable—to be heard and understood.
- Children who feel devalued can develop negative attitudes. Making constant complaints is a way to get the ear of others, leaving these *hornets* feeling valuable enough to be heard and understood—temporarily.

Instead of being an unfulfilled attacker, the Bible lets us know that when we yield our will to God’s will, we experience a life of true significance.

*“Now that you have been set free from sin
and have become slaves of God,
the benefit you reap leads to holiness,
and the result is eternal life.”*

(ROMANS 6:22)

Avoiders Feel Insecure

Tortoises have a goal to feel *safe*.

- Children who grow up in homes where anger is unrestrained, conflict goes unresolved, and where few positive interactive experiences occur typically become driven by the need for peace.
- Children who don’t feel safe typically make being safe their life goal, seeking to protect themselves from dangerous people. By turning inward and emotionally walling themselves off from others, these tortoises feel a sense of safety—temporarily.

Chameleons have a goal to feel *accepted*.

- Children who grow up with criticism and negative feedback from significant adults in their lives and who don't receive appropriate compliments and praise can become driven by the need for acceptance.
- Children starved for acceptance can become classic people-pleasers. They do whatever they think is necessary to make and keep everyone happy and to avoid being criticized or rejected, leaving these chameleons feeling accepted—temporarily.

Weasels have a goal to feel *confident*.

- Children who grow up with an overprotective, overcontrolling parent and who have no firm boundaries or personal accountability for their actions typically become driven by the need for confidence.
- Children who lack courage to take a stand find that becoming shrewd and evasive rather than honest and forthright keeps them “out of trouble.” This leaves these weasels with a sense of confidence and courage—temporarily.

Instead of being an insecure avoider, the Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will be your confidence,
and will keep your foot from being caught.”*

(PROVERBS 3:26 NKJV)

What Is the Root Cause of Negative Conflict?

A sense of significance . . .

Absalom doesn't receive it from his father, he doesn't claim it from his Creator; therefore, he pursues it for himself. After wooing the citizens of Israel by generously dispensing princely kisses and offering

to sit as judge of their grievances, Absalom leads a revolt against his father, the king, and a national power play ensues.

A dire message is delivered to King David: *“The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom”* (2 Samuel 15:13). And just as David had fled emotionally from his son, now he flees physically, fearing that Absalom *“. . . will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword”* (2 Samuel 15:14).

But the coup will conclude with God’s bringing ruin upon Absalom, who has transformed into a wolf. . . .

*“For the LORD Almighty has purposed,
and who can thwart him?
His hand is stretched out,
and who can turn it back?”*
(ISAIAH 14:27)

3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.²⁶

Love—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (JOHN 15:12).

Significance—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

Security—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge” (PROVERBS 14:26).

The Ultimate Need-Meeter

What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

Love—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

Significance—*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

Security—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

The reason we all experience conflict is rooted in a system of wrong beliefs. We assume that what we want is what we need and that it is up to us to defeat those who oppose us. After all, if we don't protect our interests, who will? This fear-based thinking causes us to respond by either attacking or avoiding the people we perceive to be threatening us.²⁷

WRONG BELIEF FOR ATTACKERS:

"I have the right to have my way by whatever means. To feel significant, I must attack and conquer. Everyone is out for himself."

WRONG BELIEF FOR AVOIDERS:

"I am afraid of conflict because it makes me feel insecure. To feel secure, I must find some way to avoid it or get rid of it. If I stand up for myself, I won't be loved."

RIGHT BELIEF:

"I know that conflict is a natural result of living with different types of people. My sense of significance and security are based on the fact that God loves me, He created me with a plan and purpose, and Jesus willingly died for me."

*"There is no fear in love.
But perfect love drives out fear,
because fear has to do with punishment.
The one who fears is not made perfect in love."
(1 JOHN 4:18)*

What Causes the Worst Conflict?

The statement “*I am against you . . .*” (Ezekiel 26:3) is among the most frightening phrases uttered by God in all of Scripture.

Whether it be directed toward a person, city, or nation, the implication is that the all-powerful God of the universe is about to execute judgment, and He won’t be staved off. Simply put, you don’t stand a chance, barring the merciful withdrawal of His outstretched hand. But in Absalom’s case, there is no merciful withdrawal. God’s plan is in place “*to bring disaster on Absalom*” (2 Samuel 17:14).

While riding on a mule in the midst of battle, Absalom’s long, flowing hair gets caught in the large branches of an oak tree and the mule runs off, leaving him hanging. He is still alive until David’s military commander plunges three javelins into his heart and soldiers strike and kill him. News of Absalom’s death stirs even greater disorder in the kingdom, and King David is, once again, awash with grief over the death of a son. “*O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!*” (2 Samuel 18:33).

Death, disorder, disaster—all prophesied by Nathan and all stemming from David’s disobedience in having another man killed and then taking his wife for his own.

*“Obey me, and I will be your God
and you will be my people.
Walk in obedience to all I command you,
that it may go well with you.”*
(JEREMIAH 7:23)

Conflict with people is one matter—but conflict with God is another. Why is conflict with God the worst conflict? Can you imagine the hands of a watch refusing to operate as the watchmaker designed them to function? What if the hands of a watch moved in the opposite direction? The watch would be useless.

You were created by God, the master designer, who has a plan and

purpose for you. In fact, His plan and deep desire is to have a meaningful relationship with you. When you enter into a relationship with Him, He will fulfill the very purpose for which you were created. The Lord says . . .

*“Many are the plans in a person’s heart,
but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.”*

(PROVERBS 19:21)

How to Resolve Your Conflict with God

There are four spiritual truths you need to know.

4 Points of God’s Plan

Whether you’re trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you’ve done or what’s been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him*" (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" (JOHN 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, "*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway*" (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, "*Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God*" (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, "*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (ROMANS 6:23).

3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*" (ACTS 16:31).

4. Your Part: Surrender

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way
instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross
to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me the person
you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)



STEPS TO SOLUTION



*“To counter evil
with evil is natural,
but to counter
evil with good is
the supernatural
work of the Lord
in you.”*



He is a runaway slave, but now he is also a brother.

Operating first as a *snake*, it appears Onesimus may have taken a swipe at his master's bank account and stolen his money. Philemon, his master and fellow worker with the apostle Paul, most certainly has suffered financial loss. But then Onesimus transforms into a turtle, avoiding ownership of any wrongdoing and flees. The name Onesimus means "useful, beneficial," but Philemon can testify through what he has experienced that the man doesn't live up to his name.

But that is before Onesimus meets Paul. A divine appointment occurs in Rome and Philemon's slave becomes sold out for Christ. Now part of the family of God, Onesimus is a spiritual *brother* to both Paul and Philemon.

The apostle assures Philemon that true spiritual transformation has occurred, that Onesimus indeed is now living up to his name.

*"Formerly he was useless to you,
but now he has become useful
both to you and to me."*

(PHILEMON 11)

Key Verse to Memorize

Paul recognizes there is a conflict to be resolved and he becomes the mediator for reconciliation.

Onesimus may now be Philemon's brother in Christ, but he also has been a drain to his master's finances. In sending Onesimus back to Philemon, Paul is concerned how the runaway slave, now turned saint, is going to be received. In a very personal overture, indicative of the deep bond that has formed between the two men, Paul writes, "*I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you*" (Philemon 12).

Paul further conveys to Philemon that with the authority of an apostle he could “. . . order you to do what you ought to do” (Philemon 8), but Paul wants to make his appeal in love. He entreats Philemon, “So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me” (Philemon 17). Paul encourages all of us just as he did with Philemon and Onesimus. . . .

*“Let us therefore make every effort
to do what leads to peace
and to mutual edification.”*
(ROMANS 14:19)

Key Passage to Read

The apostle Paul takes an even further step toward conflict resolution, and in the process provides a beautiful illustration of our relationship with God through Christ.

Paul instructs Philemon, “If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back” (Philemon 18–19). Paul’s willingness to have Onesimus’ debt imputed or reckoned against his own account is a reminder of our sins being imputed or reckoned against Jesus’ righteous account, which enables us to stand blameless before the Father in Christ’s righteousness.

Book of Philemon verses 1–25 10 Principles for Facing Conflict

1. Appreciation

Acknowledge positive attributes and actions. . . .vv. 4–7

2. Humility

Don’t speak from a position of power or authority
but of equality. . . . v. 8

3. Love	Appeal for a resolution on the basis of love. v. 9
4. Integrity	Be absolutely honest about the problems. vv. 10–11
5. Vulnerability	Share your feelings and your heart’s desire. vv. 12–13
6. Mutuality	Don’t force or coerce but defer and seek agreement.v. 14
7. Optimism	Expect the best of another.v. 14
8. Faith	Recognize and trust the sovereign hand of God. vv. 15–16
9. Forgiveness	Release the past and receive God’s plan for the future. vv. 17–20
10. Exhortation	Express confidence in God’s ability to bring about resolution.v. 21

How to Have a Transformed Life

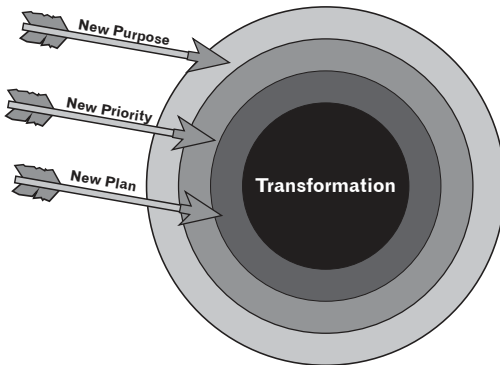
The scene is chaotic. Confusion reigns as thousands of Ephesians “*rushed into the theater together*” (Acts 19:29), the community gathering place.

They seize Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions, but their primary target is absent from the scene. The assembly is not only unruly, it’s illegal. Amidst shouts of one kind or another, the irony is: “*Most of the people did not even know why they were there*” (Acts 19:32).

The city's chief executive officer manages to quiet the crowd and leads the raucous citizens down the road to resolution. He appeals to reason in order to put a brake on runaway emotions, and immediately thereafter the assembly is dismissed. His conflict-solving words . . .

*“If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen
have a grievance against anybody,
the courts are open and there are proconsuls.
They can press charges.
If there is anything further you want to bring up,
it must be settled in a legal assembly.
As it is, we are in danger of being charged
with rioting because of what happened today.
In that case we would not be able to account
for this commotion,
since there is no reason for it.”*
(Acts 19:38–40)

Reaching the Target: Transformation!



THE FREEDOM FORMULA
A New Purpose
+ A New Priority
+ A New Plan

A Transformed Life

Target #1—A New Purpose

God's purpose for me is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

"Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (ROMANS 8:29).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ."

Target #2—A New Priority

God's priority for me is to change my thinking.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (ROMANS 12:2).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God's thinking."

Target #3—A New Plan

God's plan for me is to rely on Christ's strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength."

My Personalized Plan

Conflict happens to all of us. Two of God's premier workers in the early days of the church, Paul and Barnabas, have *"a sharp disagreement"* (Acts 15:39), resulting in each going their separate ways. The cause for contention is that Barnabas wants to take his cousin John Mark along with Paul as they revisit cities where they have ministered.

Paul disagrees, mindful that John Mark deserted them on a previous mission trip. John Mark has obviously regained the trust of Barnabas, but not of Paul. Their impasse is resolved by the launching of two separate missionary journeys instead of one, with Barnabas and his cousin going to Cyprus, and with Paul and Silas going to Syria and Cilicia. Yet later, Paul made this significant statement . . .

“I appeal to you . . . that all of you agree with one another.”

(1 CORINTHIANS 1:10)

As I prepare to walk the road to resolution of a conflict, I will remember to . . .

Pledge my commitment.

— “I am committed to this relationship.”

— “I am committed to reconciliation if at all possible.”

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”

(ROMANS 12:18).

Pray for everyone involved in the conflict.

— “Lord, please show us the true issue.”

— “Reveal any personal errors we need to face.”

— “Prepare our hearts to be open.”

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”

(PSALM 139:23–24).

Prepare before I ask for a meeting.

— Discern the root cause of the conflict.

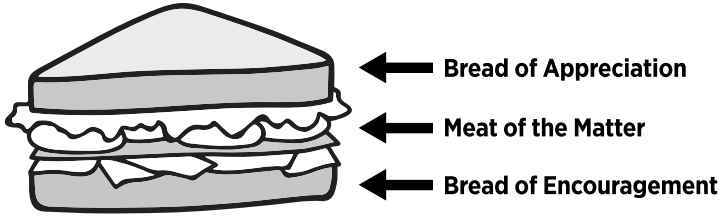
— Examine my expectations, anticipate possible reactions, and plan my responses.

— Decide on positive solutions, but plan an alternative if negotiations fail.

— Consider the “Sandwich Technique.” Begin with the “Bread of Praise” (a positive statement about the situation). Continue to the “Meat of the Matter” (clarify the events leading to the conflict, work to problem-solve a solution, and determine a course of action). Conclude with the “Bread of Encouragement” (confident reassurance to overcome the difficulty).

“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD”

(LAMENTATIONS 3:40).



Propose a time to talk face-to-face.

- “I care about our relationship. Is it possible for us to have some time to talk?”
- “I feel that there are some unresolved issues that need to be dealt with positively.”

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”
(EPHESIANS 4:3).

Provide a private place.

- Away from people
- Away from distractions

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over” (MATTHEW 18:15).

Purpose to be honest.²⁸

- Take responsibility for my actions.
- See the other person’s viewpoint.

“An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies”
(PROVERBS 12:17).

Permit total forgiveness.

- Choose to forgive any hurts.
- Avoid mentally rehearsing the faults of the other person.
- Allow God to reestablish a bond of love.

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (COLOSSIANS 3:13–14).

Perceive a future harvest.

- I am sowing seeds that may not take root until later.
- Change is a process.
- What I sow, I will reap.

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (GALATIANS 6:9).

Present the present conflict.

- Resist bringing up the past.
- Keep the conversation focused on the present conflict.

“It [love] . . . keeps no record of wrongs” (1 CORINTHIANS 13:5).

Promote fairness and objectivity.

- Avoid generalizations and stick to the facts.
- Mention both positives and negatives.

“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly” (LEVITICUS 19:15).

Protect my privacy.

- Refrain from involving outsiders.
- Control my tongue when I am with other people.

“A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret” (PROVERBS 11:13).

Preserve individuality.

- Value differences in goals, desires, and priorities.
- Refuse to demand “like-thinking.”

“I too will have my say; I too will tell what I know” (JOB 32:17).

Project openness and optimism.

- Exhibit positive body language.
- Use “I” statements and make good eye contact.

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 THESSALONIANS 5:11).

Practice love.

- End with an appropriate physical expression: a firm handshake, hug, or a pat on the back.
- Express appreciation, care, and love.

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity”
(PROVERBS 17:17).

How to Apply First Things First

Should they or shouldn't they?

False teachers in the early church are misguiding new Gentile converts, saying they have to be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul and Barnabas, who planted the churches where dissension is stirring, sharply disagree and travel to Jerusalem to settle the issue with church leadership.

After the apostles and elders discuss the divisive matter, the apostle Peter, head of the Jerusalem church, proclaims: *“We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are”* (Acts 15:11).

Two church leaders then accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch, carrying an authoritative letter resolving the conflict. They came together divided; they left together united. That's what conflict resolution is all about.

*“How good and pleasant it is when God's people
live together in unity!”*

(PSALM 133:1)

5 Ws and an H

Before attempting to resolve a conflict, first answer the following six questions, five of which start with a “W” and one with an “H.”

1. Who? Who is involved in the conflict?

- Name those presently involved in the conflict.
- List those who could be involved to bring about a resolution.

2. What? What is your goal?

- Put into writing what you want to accomplish.
- Be clear. Is this a onetime goal or a long-term goal?

3. Why? Why do you want to do it?

- List the reasons for taking action.
- List what will happen if you do not take action.

4. Where? Where will it happen?

- Assess a place where you think the conflict could possibly be resolved.
- Evaluate whether there is another suitable location where resolution could occur.

5. When? When do you want it done?

- Establish a timeline from beginning to end.
- List short-term, measurable goals.

6. How? How do you want it to be done?

- List the policies and procedures that need to be put in place.
- List the guidelines needed to accomplish the goal.

*“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge,
for the ears of the wise seek it out.”*

(PROVERBS 18:15)

How to Respond When Others Are Critical of You

Conflict comes hurling at Paul one day, one stone at a time.

His Jewish brethren, proponents of legalism and opponents of the gospel of grace, spur a crowd to throw stones at Paul—a crowd that only moments before sought to offer sacrifices to him as to a god for healing a crippled man. After the stoning, Paul is dragged out of their city and left for dead. We read in the Bible . . .

*“When the Jews [in Antioch] saw the crowds,
they were filled with jealousy.
They began to contradict what Paul was saying . . .
Then some Jews came from Antioch
and Iconium and won the crowd over.
They stoned Paul and dragged him
outside the city, thinking he was dead.”*
(ACTS 13:45; 14:19)

However, after the disciples gather around him, he gets up and goes into the city of Lystra and on to Derbe with Barnabas the next day.

As they travel, Paul and Barnabas recognize that opposition is inevitable and reassure the Christians they encounter, *“encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God’”* (Acts 14:22).

It happens all the time—even during the earliest years. One child hits another child, and the other child hits back! Human nature says respond in kind to others—insult for insult, blow for blow.

Yet one of the clearest challenges mentioned multiple times in the Bible is to not respond in kind, but instead to respond in the Spirit. To be Spirit-controlled rather than situation-controlled is not *natural* to human nature.

Being Spirit-controlled *becomes natural* because of the *new nature* a believer receives at salvation—a new nature with a new ability to be conformed to the character of Christ (Romans 8:29). Undoubtedly, to counter evil with evil is natural, but to counter evil with good is the supernatural work of the Lord in you. As the apostle Paul said . . .

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

(ROMANS 12:21)

Be discerning regarding the accuracy of the critical words of others.

Pray—“Lord, help me not to accept all critical words as true, nor to reject all words as lies. Enable me to discern the false from the true. Put a hedge of protection around my mind so that I reject the lies. Allow my heart to accept constructive criticism that brings freedom to my life and changes me for the better.”

“The wise in heart are called discerning, and gracious words promote instruction” (PROVERBS 16:21).

Be open to the slightest kernel of truth when you are criticized.

Pray—“Lord, if there is any truth in the critical words said about me, please convict my heart so that I might confess the problem and cooperate with you to bring about change.”

“A rebuke impresses a discerning person more than a hundred lashes a fool” (PROVERBS 17:10).

Be willing to consider the criticism. If it is true, this person is God’s megaphone to get your attention.

Pray—“Lord, I accept this criticism as your way of teaching me something I need to know. Please reveal to me what it is you are saying to me through the criticism.”

“The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice” (PROVERBS 12:15).

Be able to receive criticism without being defensive. Admit to any truth in the criticism—agreeing when you are in error and then asking for further correction.

Pray—“Lord, I admit that I (state the offense). I agree that I was wrong. Please continue to use others to put me on a correction course when I’m off track in my attitudes or actions. And please continue to transform me more and more into the likeness of Christ.”

“If you listen to constructive criticism, you will be at home among the wise”
(PROVERBS 15:31 NLT).

Be determined to speak well of your critic.

Pray—“Lord, I yield my tongue to you. I ask that you place a guard over my mouth so that I will speak only the truth in love to (name) and will always speak well of (name) to others. Help me to focus on the good in (name) and not on the bad.”

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (ROMANS 12:14).

Be dependent on the Lord’s perspective, not on the opinion of others, to determine your worth and value.

Pray—“Lord, thank you for establishing my worth and value by creating me, sending your Son to die for me, and adopting me into your family. I will not live for the approval of people because I have your approval, and that is all I need. Thank you for loving me and for accepting me.”

“Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (GALATIANS 1:10).

How to Follow the “Recipe” for Conflict Resolution

Conflicts within, conflicts without.

The apostle Paul finds himself embroiled in controversy both inside and outside the church, and in one instance it’s the wise, chief executive officer of the city of Ephesus who adds just the right ingredients to cool down a rapidly boiling situation.

He is the voice of reason, reviewing facts rather than revving up emotions, and calls the people of Ephesus to behave in a civilized fashion. He succeeds in conflict resolution, and the citywide commotion comes to an end. The people of Ephesus have been in an uproar over two things—their goddess and their monetary gain—and the collective finger-pointing is aimed straight at Paul.

He later writes to his disciple Timothy and shares his heart for peace and unity.

*“I want the men everywhere to pray,
lifting up holy hands
without anger or disputing.”*
(1 TIMOTHY 2:8)

You’ve probably heard the saying: “When life hands you lemons, make lemonade!” This simply means that when you find yourself in a contentious situation, a similar kind of transformation can occur as long as you add the right ingredients. By following this simple recipe, you can enjoy the sweet satisfaction of resolving bitter conflicts. The Bible says . . .



*“Gracious words are a honeycomb,
sweet to the soul
and healing to the bones.”*
(PROVERBS 16:24)

Consider the conflict between two people—a hurting struggler and an offender who is willing to listen:

Confront your offender. The struggler feels “sour” (hurt, frustrated, angry) toward the offender and needs to plan a time to get these feelings out.

- When your relationship has been cut apart, don’t hold the pain in—instead “pour it out.”
- Plan a time to meet with your offender in order to “release the juice from your lemon.”

“(Name), I need to talk with you. Is now a good time? If not, when?”
“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens . . . a time to be silent and a time to speak” (ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 7).

Communicate your feelings. The struggler “squeezes all the sour juice out of the lemon.” Express your feelings by squeezing out your pain in a way that doesn’t accuse.

- Share the problem using “I” statements, not accusatory “you” statements.

“I’m feeling deeply hurt. Would you be willing to listen?”

- Describe only the upsetting words or behavior without criticizing the person’s character.

“I felt angry last night when I wasn’t defended.”

- Don’t accuse, belittle, or attack.

“Instead, we will speak the truth in love . . . ‘don’t sin by letting anger control you.’ Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry” (EPHESIANS 4:15, 26 NLT).

Comply by listening. The offender is an “empty pitcher,” willing to collect *all* the sour juice.

- The person being confronted listens to the sour words and hears the struggler’s pain.

“Yes, I will listen.”

- The listener hears the problem—without interrupting—until the “last drop” goes into the pitcher.

- Above all, the listener must not make excuses or become angry and defensive.

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (JAMES 1:19).

Confirm by repeating. The offender “fills the pitcher with water” to neutralize the situation without acidic words.

- The offender now *verifies the problem* by repeating what has been said and then confirms by asking, “Is this correct?”

“You are saying that you felt angry last night when I didn’t defend you? Is this correct?”

- If the problem is not restated correctly, understand what was missed and repeat until it is correct.
- Then ask, “Is there more?”
“Yes, I was verbally attacked and I felt humiliated!” Repeat back anything added and ask this question again until nothing more is added.
- Agreement with the facts is not necessary; therefore, do not attempt to justify anything.

“Whoever heeds life-giving correction will be at home among the wise”
(PROVERBS 15:31).

Choose possible changes. The offender offers several possible changes in behavior, and the struggler will choose one of the changes. Realize, if the offender adds this “sugar to the lemon water,” the entire flavor changes!

- The offender offers possible “sweet solutions.”
“When someone criticizes you in front of me, I would be willing to walk away with you, express emotional support by complimenting you, or ask the person not to speak about you in that way. Which would you prefer?” This displays a willingness to support the struggler by a commitment to change.
- The hurt struggler identifies at least one acceptable response to be applied in the future.
- The willingness to listen and change behavior becomes the “sweet ingredient” for developing intimacy in the relationship.

“In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others” (PHILIPPIANS 2:3–4).

Convey compassionate care. The offender mixes the sugar and lemon juice so well that there is no hint of distasteful sourness. After the change in behavior has been agreed on, the listener expresses sorrow over the struggler’s pain and expresses appreciation for the opportunity to resolve the problem.

- Address the struggler’s pain.
“I’m so sorry my actions hurt your feelings and caused you to feel angry.”

- Thank the struggler for approaching you.

“Thank you for coming to me directly. I appreciate being given a chance to change my behavior in the future in order to improve our relationship.”

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver”

(PROVERBS 25:11 ESV).

Consider your own condition. The struggler should consider that the offender could also have been offended. This would be like adding tart lime to the mix. But just as lemonade can be enhanced with the addition of sweet raspberry or mango syrup, so too can relationships be enhanced when both the struggler and the offender acknowledge their own struggles and offenses.

- Question whether you have caused pain.

“Have I hurt you by bringing this to your attention?”

- Apologize and ask forgiveness for contributing to the conflict.

“I’m sorry I didn’t make my feelings clear about this before it became an issue. Would you forgive me too?”

- Thank the listener for both accepting and extending mercy.

“Thank you for allowing me to voice my concerns. I’m very grateful we have addressed this issue. Now we can focus on enjoying our time together.”

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:18).

- Thank God for allowing you to participate with Him in turning lemons into lemonade!

“Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”

(PROVERBS 11:25)

How to Respond to Difficult Personalities

His name is Demetrius, and he most definitely can be described as having a “difficult personality.”

Paul’s words are interfering with the weight of Demetrius’ wallet, and he’s determined to do something about it. A prosperous silversmith who makes statues of the goddess Artemis, Demetrius wants to muzzle Paul’s message that “*gods made by human hands are no gods at all*” (Acts 19:26). Business is going badly because of Paul’s proclamations, and Demetrius says he’s concerned that Artemis “*will be robbed of her divine majesty*” (Acts 19:27).

An attacker who feels he’s losing his significance, Demetrius incites fury in his fellow tradesmen, and “*soon the whole city was in an uproar*” (Acts 19:29). But the protective hand of God is on Paul, and he is a recipient of the promises found in Psalm 27:5:

*“For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.”*

Responding to Attackers Who Want to Feel Significant

1. Wolves²⁹ Goal: To feel powerful

- Let them have their say without interrupting.
- Get their attention with praise.
- Hold your ground. (Match strength with strength.)
- Avoid arguments.
- Don’t put yourself down.

“Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels” (2 TIMOTHY 2:23).

2. Snakes³⁰ Goal: To feel superior

- Be aware of their power to destroy.
- Enlist someone to help you confront them in private.
- Catch them when they lie.
- Expect them to deny what they have done.
- Don't let them get away with an attack.

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (MATTHEW 18:15–17).

3. Hornets³¹ Goal: To feel valuable

- Learn to halt negative conversation.
- Respond only to what is important.
- Confront their game-playing.
- Encourage a look at solutions.
- Don't reinforce their complaints.

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (EPHESIANS 4:29).

**Responding to Avoiders
Who Want to Feel Secure**

1. Turtles³² Goal: To feel safe

- Ask questions that require more than yes or no answers.
- Seek to help them express their feelings.
- Keep trying patiently until you get a response.
- Be positive, not critical, with them.
- Don't answer for them.

"A person is praised according to their prudence, and one with a warped mind is despised" (PROVERBS 12:8).

2. Chameleons³³ Goal: To feel accepted

- Make it okay for them to disagree with you.
- Help them identify priorities.
- Learn their hidden fears.
- Reinforce their decisions.
- Don't assume their Yes is complete agreement with you. It's okay to agree to disagree.

"Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up"
(PROVERBS 12:25).

3. Weasels Goal: To feel confident

- Avoid accusations.
- Don't let yourself be drawn into arguments.
- Be strong and firm.
- Be forgiving.
- Be consistently encouraging.

"Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses . . . in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left" (2 CORINTHIANS 6:4, 7).

How to Turn Foes into Friends

Imagine the angst. It hurts when your own people talk against you. Paul's foes share his family heritage and his heart is pained by their persecution.

Paul longs to see his Jewish brothers and sisters come to faith in Christ, to soften their hearts toward the true Messiah and Savior. But they are his major opposition, as he aptly testifies: *"I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents"* (Acts 20:19).

Eventually Paul's prayers, love, and faithful proclamation of the gospel turn some of the Jews from foes into friends—they became fellow believers in the Lord Jesus. Paul's tender care reflects the compassion of Christ and that makes all the difference.

*"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.
For I could wish that I myself were cursed
and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people,
those of my own race."*

(ROMANS 9:2–3)

Rather than resolving conflicts by treating your opponents as foes, follow the steps in this F-R-I-E-N-D-S acrostic.

F—Find ways to compliment your opposer.

- Look for and acknowledge positive character traits that your opposer possesses.
- Don't focus on complimentary externals such as clothes, hair, or good looks.
- Express a sincere compliment at an appropriate time. "I've noticed (how effectively you spoke/worked/sang), and I really admire that about you."

"The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just" (PSALM 37:30).

R—Repay your opposer's evil with good.

- Look for and extend acts of kindness.
- Commit to God that you will not act negatively, even if your opposer does.
- Do not talk about your opposer in a demeaning way to others.

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone" (ROMANS 12:17).

I—Intercede in prayer for your opposer.

- Ask God to reveal your opposer's genuine needs.
- Seek the Lord's perspective on the differences between you and your opposer.

- Commit to praying for your opposer every time the person comes to mind.

“As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right” (1 SAMUEL 12:23).

E—Empathize with your opposer.

- Learn about past hurts and hardships your opposer has experienced.
- Get in touch with your feelings as you think about your own hurts and hardships.
- Allow yourself to feel compassion as you identify with your opposer.

“Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble” (1 PETER 3:8).

N—Nurture a forgiving heart toward your opposer.

- Realize that you have wounded others also.
- Remember that you also stand in need of forgiveness.
- Pray for God to give you a willingness to forgive just as He is willing to forgive you.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (EPHESIANS 4:32).

D—Decide to love your opposer.

- See yourself as a conduit of God’s love. (The Greek word *agape* is a love that seeks the highest good of another person.)
- Look for tangible ways to express *agape* love on a continual basis.
- Keep focusing on what is in the best interests of your opposer—and then do it.

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law” (ROMANS 13:8).

S—Seek to reach out to your opposer.

- Reach out by looking for what is especially meaningful to your opposer (such as a note of encouragement).

- Reach out by inviting your opposer to an event that you know would be enjoyable.
- Reach out by taking food to your opposer when you hear that person is sick or has lost a loved one.

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head” (ROMANS 12:20).



SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



*“First seek the counsel
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

Does God hold me accountable to
live at peace with everyone?

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you,

***live at peace with everyone.*"**

(ROMANS 12:18)

Am I to **make every effort** to achieve
peace in my relationships?

*"Let us therefore **make every effort** to do
what leads to **peace** and to mutual edification."*

(ROMANS 14:19)

What should I do if someone starts
foolish arguments?

*"Don't have anything to do with **foolish**
and stupid **arguments**,
because you know they produce quarrels."*

(2 TIMOTHY 2:23)

What should I do when someone
sins against me?

*“If your brother or sister **sins**, go
and point out their fault, just between the two of you.
If they listen to you, you have won them over.
But if they will not listen,
take one or two others along,
so that ‘every matter may be established
by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’”*
(MATTHEW 18:15–16)

In the midst of conflict, what **things** should I **think
about?** . . . Should I think the best of others?

*“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true,
whatever is noble, whatever is right,
whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,
whatever is admirable—
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—
think about such **things.**”*
(PHILIPPIANS 4:8)

Do I appeal to others in a **spirit of unity?**

*“Make every effort to keep the **unity
of the Spirit** through the bond of peace.”*
(EPHESIANS 4:3)

Am I more interested in stating my **own opinions**
rather than understanding another’s viewpoint?

*“Fools find no pleasure in understanding
but delight in airing their **own opinions.**”*
(PROVERBS 18:2)

Does God want me **not** to **take revenge**,
but rather allow Him to fight my battles?

*“Do **not take revenge**, my dear friends, but leave
room for God’s wrath, for it is written:
‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*
(ROMANS 12:19)

Do I have a heart that is quick to **forgive**?

*“Bear with each other and **forgive** one another
if any of you has a grievance against someone.”*
(COLOSSIANS 3:13)

Am I supposed to **pray** for those
who are my **enemies**?

*“But I tell you, love your **enemies**
and **pray for** those who persecute you.”*
(MATTHEW 5:44)



ENDNOTES & BIBLIOGRAPHY



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*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”
(Jeremiah 29:11)*

To learn more about Hope For The Heart, our ministry, resources, and initiatives, call 1-800-488-HOPE (4673) or visit HopeForTheHeart.org.

www.HopeForTheHeart.org

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Solving Your People Problems

In your mind, does the word conflict spell t-r-o-u-b-l-e? Disharmony in the home, wars in the workplace, disputes in the church—each situation should lead us to the One to whom we turn for direction, strength, and courage, but does it always? These *Keys for Living* will help you come to understand the differences between resolution and reconciliation, and come to believe that resolution rests in confronting the wrong...with the right heart. Learn to identify who creates conflict and who keeps it going, as well as the what, why, and how of boundaries in conflict resolution.

KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY



"First seek the counsel of the LORD."
(1 Kings 22:5)

Life is full of challenges, but there is hope. The *Keys for Living Library* provides biblical truth and practical help for more than 100 topics to help you overcome difficulties, grow in maturity, and move forward in life. In each of the 100+ Keys, you'll discover God's wisdom and guidance in a simple format:

- *Definitions* help you understand the topic from God's perspective.
- *Characteristics* give insight into the different aspects of the topic.
- *Causes* shed light on the underlying issues related to the topic.
- *Steps to Solution* show you how to be transformed and walk in freedom.

Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10). Our prayer is that God will use these *Keys for Living* to encourage, equip, and empower you with His life-changing truth.

