

CONFLICT: FIELD GUIDE

Conflict is our constant opportunity. Harris Creek is committed to resolving conflict in a way that glorifies the Lord, edifies the body of Christ, and reflects the principles laid out in Scripture. Since all relationships – including those among believers – will be faced with disagreements at different times, all Harris Creek Covenant Members, as followers of Christ, commit to the following biblical principles as a guide for resolving these issues. We trust that the following information will serve as a continual resource for you as you strive to serve others, grow personally, and glorify the Lord in the context of conflict.

Scriptures to read and remember when considering how you are going to handle conflict: Proverbs 6:16-19, Proverbs 17:14, Proverbs 20:3, Matthew 5:23-24, 1 Peter 5:5-7, Ephesians 4:1-3, Proverbs 18:19.

Harris Creek's Commitment to Biblical Conflict Resolution: The Peacemaker's Pledge

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict. We also believe conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ. Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on His grace, we commit ourselves to respond to conflict according to the following principles:

Glorify God – Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will seek to please and honor God – by depending on His wisdom, power, and love; by faithfully obeying His commands; and by seeking to maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude.

Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye – Instead of attacking others or dwelling on their wrongs, we will take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts – confessing our sins, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict and seeking to repair any harm we have caused.

Go and Gently Restore Your Brother - Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will choose to overlook minor offenses, or we will talk directly and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook. When a conflict with another Christian cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner.

Go and Be Reconciled – Instead of accepting premature

compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation – forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences.

By God's grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing that conflict is an opportunity, not an accident. We will remember that success in God's eyes is not a matter of specific results but of faithful, dependent obedience. And we will pray that our service as peacemakers brings praise to our Lord and leads others to know His infinite love. These principles are so simple that they can be used to resolve the most basic conflicts of daily life. But they are so powerful that they have been used to mediate and arbitrate bitter divorce and child custody actions, embezzlement situations, church divisions, multi-million dollar business disputes, malpractice lawsuits, and terrible sexual abuse cases. These principles are briefly discussed below. For a more detailed explanation, please see *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, by Ken Sande (Baker Books, 2nd ed. 1997).

At The Trailhead: Understanding the Landscape

SEE CONFLICT AS AN OPPORTUNITY

Conflict is not necessarily bad or destructive. Even when conflict is caused by sin and causes a great deal of stress, God can use it for good. (Romans 8:28-19) As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, conflict actually provides three significant opportunities. By God's grace, you can use conflict to:

- Glorify God by trusting, obeying, and imitating Him.
- Serve other people by helping to bear their burdens or by confronting them in love.
- Grow to be like Christ by confessing sin and turning from attitudes that promote conflict.

These concepts are totally overlooked in most conflicts because people naturally focus on escaping from the situation or overcoming their opponent. Therefore, it is wise to periodically step back from a conflict and ask yourself whether you are doing all that you can to take advantage of these special opportunities.

GLORIFY GOD

When the Apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to live "to the glory of God," he was not talking about one hour on Sunday morning. He wanted them to show God honor and bring Him praise in day-to-day life, especially by the way that they resolved personal conflicts. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

As mentioned above, you can glorify God in the midst of

conflict by trusting Him, obeying Him and imitating Him. (Proverbs 3:4-6; John 14:15; Ephesians 5:1) One of the best ways to keep these concerns uppermost in your mind is to regularly ask yourself this focusing question: "How can I please and honor the Lord in this situation?"

Preparing for the Journey

GET THE LOG OUT OF YOUR OWN EYE

The most challenging part of peace-making is set forth in Matthew 7:5, where Jesus admonishes us to "...first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

There are generally two kinds of logs you need to look for when seeing your part in the conflict. First, you need to consider your own attitudes and biases. Critical, negative or overly sensitive attitudes easily lead to unnecessary conflict. One of the best ways to do this is to spend some time meditating on Philippians 4:2-9, which describes the kind of attitude Christians should have, even when they are involved in a conflict.

The other log you must deal with is actual sinful words and actions. Because we are often blind to our own failures, we must have honest friends who will help us take an objective look at ourselves and face up to our contribution to a conflict.

The most important aspect of getting the log out of your own eye is to go beyond the confession of wrong behavior and face up to the root cause of that behavior. The Bible teaches that conflict comes from the "desires at war within you" (James 4:1-3; Matthew 15:18-19). Some of these desires are obviously sinful, such as wanting to conceal the truth, bend others to your will or have revenge. In many situations, however, conflict is fueled by good desires that you have elevated to a sinful place, such as an unhealthy craving to be understood, loved, respected or vindicated (1 Peter 2:23).

Any time you become excessively preoccupied with something, even a good thing, and seeks to find happiness, security, or fulfillment in it rather than in God, you are guilty of idolatry. Idolatry inevitably leads to conflict with God. It also causes conflict with other people. As James writes, when we want something but don't get it, we kill and covet, quarrel, and fight (James 4:1-4). Having done the hard work of discovering your part in the conflict, it is time to take action. Below is a clear, seven-step process to help you first examine yourself and then move forward as a peacemaker:

1. Ask the Lord and others for help with self-awareness. (1 John 1:8)
2. Ask God to show you where you have been guilty of "wrong worship," which is to say where you have been focusing your attention and love on something other than the Lord and His desires. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me; And lead me in the everlasting way." (Psalm 139:23-24)
3. Specifically identify and renounce the desire contributing to the conflict.

4. Deliberately pursue right worship. Fix your heart and mind on God, and seek joy in Him alone.
5. Give others permission to speak into your life, and regularly ask them to help you see any "logs" both in attitude and action.
6. Address everyone involved as soon as possible. (Matthew 5:23-24, Proverbs 6:1-5)
7. Avoid "if, but, and maybe." Don't make excuses; be specific, when possible, with both attitudes and actions. (Luke 15:17-24)
8. Apologize. Express sorrow for the way you affected someone. (Luke 15:21)
9. Ask for forgiveness. (Proverbs 28:13)
10. Accept the consequences. (Luke 19:1-9)
11. Alter your behavior. Commit to changing harmful habits. (Ephesians 4:22-32, John 8:11)
12. As God guides and empowers these efforts, you can find freedom from the idols that fuel conflict and be motivated to make choices that will please and honor Christ. This change in heart will usually speed a resolution to a present problem, and at the same time improve your ability to avoid similar conflicts in the future.

Beginning the Journey: Hitting the Trail to Love Your Friend

DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

Another key principle of peacemaking involves an effort to help others understand how they have contributed to a conflict. Before you rush off to confront someone, however, remember that it is appropriate to overlook minor offenses. (Proverbs 19:11) As a general rule, an offense should be overlooked if you can answer "no" to all of the following questions:

- Is the offense seriously dishonoring God?
- Has it permanently damaged a relationship?
- It is seriously hurting other people?
- Is it seriously hurting the offender himself?

TALK IN PRIVATE

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, an offense is too serious to overlook, in which case God commands you to go and talk with the offender privately and lovingly about the situation (see Matthew 18:15). As you do so, remember to:

- **Pray for humility and wisdom.** (1 Peter 5:5)
- **Plan your words carefully;** think of how you would want to be confronted. (Proverbs 15:1-2; 16:23)
- **Anticipate likely reactions,** and plan appropriate responses; rehearsals and be very helpful. (Proverbs 20:18)
- **Choose the right time and place.** Talk in person whenever possible.

(Proverbs 16:21; 27:12)

- **Assume the best** about the other person until you have facts to prove otherwise. (Proverbs 18:17)
- **Listen carefully.** (Proverbs 18:13)
- **Speak only to build others up.** (Ephesians 4:29)
- **Ask for feedback** from the other person. (Proverbs 18:2)
- **Trust God.** (Psalm 37:3)

DON'T STOP IF YOU'VE BEEN STIFFED

If an initial confrontation does not resolve a conflict, do not give up. Review what was said and done, and look for ways to approach the other person more effectively. Then try again with even stronger prayer support. If you have done all you can to share your concern, and the matter is still unchanged in that it is “too serious to overlook,” you should ask one or two other people to meet with you and the person you have approached to help you resolve your differences. (Matthew 18:16-20)

DON'T STOP IF IT GETS STICKY

As unfortunate as it is, there are times when the only solution left is to expand the circle of accountability and wisdom to include an even wider community within the body of Christ. It is imperative that the process is not stopped short of any Scriptural admonition to diligently preserve the unity that the Lord intends. Where conflict persists, it is the job of the wider community of faith to speak boldly into the matter and, where necessary, separate itself from hard hearts that refuse to deal with matters “too serious to overlook.” (Matthew 18:17a; 1 Corinthians 5:1-2) That may include necessary separation until such a time as when the sin issues creating the conflict are acknowledged and dealt with.

GO AND BE RECONCILED

One of the unique features of biblical peacemaking is the pursuit of genuine forgiveness and reconciliation. Even though followers of Christ have experienced the greatest forgiveness in the world, we often fail to show that forgiveness to others. To cover up our disobedience, we often use the shallow statement, “I forgive her; I just don't want to have anything to do with her again.” Just think, however, how you would feel if God said to you, “I forgive you; I just don't want to have anything to do with you again.” Praise God that He never says this! Instead, He forgives you totally and opens the way for genuine reconciliation. He calls you to forgive others in exactly the same way: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:12-14; see also 1 Corinthians 13:5; Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 43:25) One way to imitate God's forgiveness is to live with these actions and attitudes when you forgive someone:

- I will not dwell on this incident.
- I will not revisit this incident or use it against you.
- I will not talk to others about this incident.

- I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

Remember that forgiveness is a spiritual process that you cannot fully accomplish on your own. Therefore, as you seek to forgive others, continually ask God for grace to enable you to imitate His wonderful forgiveness toward you.

NEGOTIATE IN A BIBLICAL MANNER

Even when you manage to resolve personal offenses through confession and forgiveness, you may still need to deal with substantive issues, which may involve money, property, or the exercise of certain rights. These issues should not be swept under the carpet or automatically passed to a higher authority. Instead, they should be negotiated in a biblically faithful manner. As a general rule, you should try to negotiate substantive issues in a cooperative manner rather than a competitive manner. In other words, instead of aggressively pursuing your own interests and letting others look out for themselves, you should deliberately look for solutions that are beneficial to everyone involved.

As the Apostle Paul put it, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4; see Matthew 22:39; 1 Corinthians 13:5; Matthew 7:12).

A biblical approach to negotiation may be summarized in five basic steps, which we refer to as the **PAUSE** principle:

- **P**repare (pray, get the facts, seek godly counsel, develop options)
- **A**ffirm relationships (show genuine concern and respect for others)
- **U**nderstand interests (identify others' concerns, desires, needs, limitations, or fears)
- **S**earch for creative solutions (prayerful brainstorming)
- **E**valuate options objectively and reasonably (evaluate, don't argue)

If you have never used this approach to negotiation before, it will take time and practice (and sometimes advice from others) to become proficient at it. But it is well worth the effort, because learning the PAUSE principle will help you not only resolve your present dispute but also negotiate more effectively in all areas of your life.

Enduring Difficulties On The Journey: What To Do When The Trail Gets Rough

BE PREPARED FOR UNREASONABLE PEOPLE

Whenever you are responding to conflict, you need to realize that other people may harden their hearts and refuse to be reconciled to you. There are two ways you can prepare for this possibility.

First, remember that God does not measure success

in terms of results but in terms of faithful obedience. He knows that you cannot force other people to act in a certain way. Therefore, He will not hold you responsible for their actions or for the ultimate outcome of a conflict. All God expects of you is to obey His revealed will as faithfully as possible (see Romans 12:18). If you do that, no matter how the conflict turns out, you can walk away with a clear conscience before God, knowing that His appraisal is, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Second, resolve that you will not give up on finding a biblical solution. If a dispute is not easily resolved, you may be tempted to say, "Well, I tried all the biblical principles I know, and they just didn't work. It looks like I'll have to handle this another way" (meaning, the world's way).

A follower of Christ should never close the Bible. When you try to resolve a conflict but do not see the results you desire, you should seek God even more earnestly through prayer, the study of His Word, and the counsel of His church. As you do so, it is essential to keep your focus on Christ and all that He has already done for you (Colossians 3:1-4).

It is also helpful to follow five principles for overcoming evil, which are described in Romans 12:14-21:

- Control your tongue; "Bless those who curse you." (See also Ephesians 4:29)
- Seek godly advisors; identify with others, and do not become isolated.
- Keep doing what is right (1 Peter 2:12, 15; 3:15-16).
- Recognize your limits, instead of retaliating, stay within proper biblical channels.
- Use the ultimate weapon: deliberate, focused love (John 3:16; LUke 6:27-31).

At the very least, these steps will protect you from being consumed by the acid of your own bitterness and resentment if others continue to oppose you. And in some cases, God may eventually use such actions to bring others to repentance. (1 Samuel 24:1-22) Even if other people persist in doing wrong, you can continue to trust that God is in control and will deal with them in His time. (See Psalms 10 and 37) This kind of patience in the face of suffering is commended by God (1 Peter 2:19) and ultimately results in our good and His glory.

GET HELP FROM ABOVE

None of us can make complete and lasting peace with others in our own strength. We must have help from God. But, before we can receive that help, we need to be at peace with God Himself.

Peace with God doesn't come automatically, because all of us have sinned and alienated ourselves from Him. (Isaiah 59:1-2) Instead of living the perfect lives needed to enjoy fellowship with Him, each of us has a record stained with sin. (Matthew 5:48; Romans 3:23) As a result, we deserve to be eternally separated from God. (Romans 6:23a) That's the bad news.

The good news is that "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." (John 3:16) Believing in Jesus means more than being baptized, going to church, or trying to be a good person. None of these activities can erase the sins you have already committed and will continue to commit throughout your life. Believing in Jesus means, first of all, admitting that you are a sinner and acknowledging that there is no way you can earn God's approval by your own works. (Romans 3:20; Ephesians 2:8-9)

Second, it means believing that Jesus paid the full penalty for your sins when He died on the cross (Isa. 53:1-12; 1 Peter 2:24-25). In other words, believing in Jesus means trusting that He exchanged records with you at Calvary – that is, He took your sinful record on Himself and paid for it in full, giving you His perfect record.

When you believe in Jesus and receive His perfect record of righteousness, you can really have true peace with God. As you receive this peace, God will give you an increasing ability to make peace with others by following the peacemaking principles He gives us in Scripture, many of which are described above (Phil. 4:7; Matt. 5:9). If you have never confessed your sin to God and believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior, Lord, and King, you can do so right now by sincerely praying this prayer:

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner, and I realize that my good deeds could never make up for my wrongs. I need your forgiveness. I believe that you died for my sins, and I want to turn away from them. I trust you now to be my Savior, and I will follow you as my Lord and King, in the fellowship of your church.

If you have prayed this prayer, it is essential that you find fellowship with other Christians in a church where the Bible is faithfully taught and applied. This fellowship will help you to learn more about God, grow in your faith, and obey what He commands, even when you are involved in a difficult conflict. Let us know how Harris Creek might be able to serve you as your place of fellowship.

GET HELP FROM THE CHURCH

As God helps you to practice His peacemaking principles, you will be able to resolve most of the normal conflicts of daily life on your own. Sometimes, however, you will encounter situations that you do not know how to handle.

In such situations, it is wise and appropriate to turn to others in your community or to spiritually mature persons around you who can give you advice on how you might be able to apply these principles more effectively.

When individual advice does not enable you to resolve a dispute, you should ask one or two mutually respected friends to meet with you and your opponent to help you settle your difference through mediation or arbitration (Matt. 18:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:1-8).

If there is any way that we can serve you or help you apply these principles to your relationships, please let us know.

*Material adapted or borrowed from Ken Sande whose generosity in sharing his excellent work on conflict in *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, © 1997 made this material possible.*