

# MODULE 4: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict is inevitable in relationships, but it does not mean we should avoid living in community. In fact, building healthy and peaceful relationships depends on our very ability to face conflict and work our way through it. The Bible provides specific step-by-step guidance to resolve conflicts as well as examples which we will discuss in this module.

## SESSION 1: APPROACHING PERSONAL CONFLICTS

### Key Ideas for This Session:

- All relationships have conflict—it is a part of life.
- There can be many factors that trigger conflict including physiological, cultural and situational contexts.
- Conflict resolution that focuses on the relationship first and the problem second, can help preserve healthy relationships for life.
- Key verse: John 16:33  
*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.*

### Everyone Will Face Conflict at Some Point:

Each of us have interactions and relationships with different kinds of people. This can include family members, bosses, co-workers, friends, neighbours, people with whom we do business, and even strangers. Some of the people we interact with may be quite different from us. As a result, sometimes things can get complicated, and conflict can be a part of that.

Conflicts can occur when parties are seeing things differently. They typically involve serious disagreements or disputes that cannot be resolved quickly.

Think about the various people who come and go in your life. Have you, or do you, have conflicts with any of them and if so, why?

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There can be many factors that contribute to conflict. There can be cultural differences between people where behaviours, language and beliefs may translate differently, and this can create tensions. Sometimes, men and women process information differently and it leads to conflict. Situational conflicts may also erupt, for example, in an individual's workplace or family life.

Can you think of other contexts that would set the stage for potential conflicts?

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Conflict is a fact of life. It is not always avoidable and in fact, if handled properly can actually lead to new thinking, innovation and healthy progress. It can strengthen relationships!

In this module, we will explore a Biblical approach that prioritizes reconciliation as part of the pathway to resolving a conflict. When both parties have a spirit of harmony and goodwill towards one another, they can more easily find their way out of a conflict and into an agreement.

Although some situations naturally lend themselves to conflict, conflicts can also happen when you least expect them and sometimes with your closest people. The Bible provides powerful guidance on how to live your life to steer clear of unhealthy conflict in the first place, and then how to approach it should you find a situation erupting.

*Note: The conflict resolution approach below, is based in part on Rick Warren's A Purpose Driven Life, Chapter 20.*

## **When You Find Yourself in a Conflict...**

**1) Involve God first, then the person:**

Read Galatians 5:22-23 and list below the “fruits of the spirit.” Pray that during a time of conflict, you can claim these fruits and act on them in a spirit of goodwill.

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Pray that you have self-awareness regarding your part in the conflict. One of the key questions to ask yourself is “What is the result I really want from this?” In some cases, it may be necessary to stand your ground when a principle of integrity, truth, or morality is at stake. In other situations, however, there may not be any higher ground to consider. It may simply be that you want your own way as a matter of self-interest or even stubbornness. Pray for discernment to understand which it is. Sometimes in these cases, the stakes are also very high. Winning could actually damage your relationship with the other person.

Read Psalm 51:1-13.  
*Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to Your great compassion blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. <sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. <sup>4</sup> Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight; so You are right in Your verdict and justified when You judge. <sup>5</sup> Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. <sup>6</sup> Yet You desired faithfulness even in the womb; You taught me wisdom in that secret place.*

*<sup>7</sup> Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones You have crushed rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. <sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, so that sinners will turn back to You.*

In this Scripture, King David pleads with God for a clean heart. Why is he asking for this?

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God is the one who can change hearts and set motivations on a new path. Changed hearts can potentially eliminate conflict in ways we never considered.

## **2) Don't delay in dealing with a conflict:**

When a serious disagreement occurs, it is often tempting to retreat and avoid communication. Although it is important to cool off and spend time in prayer, not dealing with something allows wounds to fester. Take the initiative towards healing.

Matthew 5:23, 24

*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.*

What reasons might someone have to avoid resolving a conflict?

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## **3) Allow the other person to express their feelings and have empathy:**

Emotions can underlie and impact a conflict far beyond the issues at play. When someone has the opportunity to express their feelings freely (without the other party being defensive), it can diffuse a situation and allow for clearer thinking. Plus, it lets the speaker know that the other party cares about them and is willing to listen.

Philippians 2:4

*Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others...*

A good listener is someone who has the ability to feel empathy for another. Empathy is the ability to put oneself in another's shoes and to understand their perspective.

How would you describe empathy versus sympathy?

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Understanding where someone is coming from, also includes their life context. Their context can include their physiology, culture, and specific life situations.

Physiologically, it is important to note that as humans, our thinking is divided into the left and right sides of our brains. As author Daniel Pink observes, there are two distinct areas, responsible for specific actions<sup>10</sup>:

Left-Brain Thinking	Right-Brain Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Verbal expression</li><li>• Sorting through information and details</li><li>• Language</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Non-verbal aspects—“go with your gut”</li><li>• Intuition</li><li>• Spatial and visual relationships</li><li>• Creativity</li></ul>

The left and right division is not necessarily a 50/50 split for each person. Some individuals tend to be more right-brain oriented, creative, and free, while others tend to be more left-brain oriented, analytical, and structured. This can influence the ways that different people respond and communicate.

**Right Brain or Left?**

Circle the correct letter that corresponds to left brain (L) and right brain (R) thinking.

L	R	Reading a map
L	R	Having a discussion about how the day went
L	R	Channel surfing on the TV
L	R	Building a shed
L	R	Composing music

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Pink

How did you choose your answers?

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Why might a conflict arise between a left-brain-oriented person and right-brain-oriented person who are discussing an issue in order to make a decision?

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Often our timing for talking about an issue or making a decision is as important as the issue or decision itself. We need to consider the other person to figure out the right timing to bring up an issue. It is very unlikely that two people with different life experiences will respond in the same way at the same time.

Next session, we will keep unpacking this approach to conflict resolution. To summarize:

- 1) When you seek wisdom from God first; and,
- 2) When you live your life in keeping with the “fruits of the Spirit”; and,
- 3) When you put the other person first and allow them to freely express their emotion; and,

**= You are on the right track. You are on a path to peace.**

Lamentations 3:40

***Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.***

Break into small groups and discuss the following if there is time, or consider these topics this week:

- *Consider a conflict you have been in recently or one you may be in now. Reflect and pray on these questions as you seek to understand and discern your part in it:*
  - *Why do I feel such a strong need to win? Or why am I avoiding this situation?*
  - *If I get my way, how will others be impacted?*
  - *Why does the other person think the way they do?*
  - *Am I avoiding the disagreement or conflict because I don't really care about the other person(s)?*
  - *Do I need to be more flexible so we can resolve the disagreement together, and pursue a solution that will satisfy us both?*

- *Consider John 14:27 as you reflect on conflict resolution this week: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*