

MODULE 4: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

SESSION 3: BARRIERS TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Key Ideas for This Session:

- Conflict results from a struggle between competing goals, interests, and agendas.
- Conflict escalates through pride, ego, insecurity, and fear.
- Conflict can be reduced and resolved through learning to forgive and to be forgiven.
- Compromise and collaboration are possible once barriers are removed.
- Key verse: James 4:1-2:
What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

Conflicts occur when parties are not seeing eye to eye on something. Conflict in itself is not a bad thing and can lead to growth. However, when a situation escalates into a serious disagreement, the risk of long-lasting damage is real. Things might be said or done that cannot be taken back.

Today we are looking at barriers that obstruct our ability for successful conflict resolution. Powerful responses for working through conflict include forgiveness, compromise and collaboration.

Fight or Flight Instinct:

There are two common ways that people respond to conflict. One is to fight back or to fight in order to win; the other is to turn your back on conflict and avoid dealing with the other person.

The fight instinct is combative and confrontational. For some of us it might mean talking louder, talking more, or becoming aggressive toward the other person. Perhaps we react this way because it has sometimes worked for us.

You may have grown up in a competitive household where it was survival of the fittest. If you didn't look out for yourself, nobody else would.

The opposite of this is to avoid conflict through "flight." This could include disengaging from the other person, turning inward through silence, not listening, or responding and even walking away. Someone who avoids disagreement or conflict will tend to become isolated from other people, be taken advantage of by others, and will be unable to contribute to a situation in which new ideas, alternatives or challenges are presented. Usually, people who avoid disagreement and conflict at all costs do so for a reason—they may have learned at an early age that when there was conflict, they always got hurt.

Which approach might you be more likely to take?

If you tend to favour one or the other, what kinds of strategies might you use to undo these approaches?

In the story of Jonah in the Bible's Old Testament, the prophet Jonah himself had a flight response. God had asked something of him that he did not want to do. He ended up in a storm, thrown overboard, swallowed by a whale, and then spat up on shore. When he finally did what God asked (going to the great city of Nineveh with a warning that God would destroy the people if they did not turn from their wicked ways), it resulted in many lives saved.

Jonah 3:10
When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened.

Why do you think Jonah tried to flee from God's request?

Have you ever run away from a situation, believing it was going to make something worse?

Have you ever faced a situation calmly while resisting the temptation of fight or flight?

Compromise and Collaboration:

Compromising and collaborating are approaches to conflict that do not involve the fight or flight instinct.

With conflict, one asks, “who wins and who loses”? With compromise, there is no winner or loser. An agreement is reached through give and take by both parties. Collaboration looks for win-win solutions where both parties are heard and their needs taken into account. To demonstrate the range of responses from fight/flight/win/lose to compromise/collaboration/win/win, here is a script and explanation:

“No way”	Forget about it! I refuse to deal with this disagreement.
“Have it your way”	I’ll give in by letting you argue your way out of it, but I’m not happy about it.
“My way or the highway”	“Over my dead body!” I will argue my point and stand my ground against the other person no matter what.
“Going half way”	I’ll give an inch if you’ll give an inch. Let’s find middle ground where both of us will be partially satisfied.
“Finding our way”	Can we work on an alternative solution together that will satisfy both of us fully? It doesn’t have to be either or. Maybe there is a new way altogether.

Which option(s) above describes how you have been reacting to conflict in your life?

For each “I” statement below, identify the type of conflict response from these five choices:

1) No Way	2) Have It Your Way	3) My Way or the Highway	4) Going Halfway	5) Finding Our Way
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“I” Statements	Which Response? (1-5)
I don’t want to go to your parents for Christmas. You don’t want to go see my parents. Maybe we can think of another way of doing Christmas dinner this year. Any ideas?	
My boss is coming down the hallway. I know she’s going to ask me to switch my day off. I’m leaving now. Just tell her I’ve just left for lunch break.	
I don’t want to paint the kitchen green. I simply can’t stand cooking in a lime-green kitchen!	
You like the blue carpet and I like the brown. How about we get a blue carpet with a nice brown trim around the edges?	
Fine, you like the brown carpet so fine. I’ll put up with a house with a crappy brown carpet.	

Pride Comes Before a Fall

Conflicts can arise and intensify as a result of an underlying personal issue such as pride, ego, insecurity, jealousy, or fear. Scripture identifies these “issues” as sin, because they spiritually alienate us from God as well as from people.

Romans 15:5

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.

When we are focused on getting our own way, we will find ourselves competing with the other person who wants to have it their way, or who has a negative attitude toward our interests. Typically, in such situations our pride and ego “dig in” to the point where competition escalates into conflict because neither of us will back down. As the stand-off escalates into a serious disagreement, it becomes harder to avoid becoming hostile, angry, abusive, or even hateful toward the other person. At times, the original reason for the conflict may even be forgotten, as the hate takes on a life of its own.

If both you and the other person are having a similar reaction, the relationship is in serious trouble. The only way for the conflict to be resolved and the relationship to be restored is through repentance and forgiveness. One or both parties need to recognize their wrongdoing in the process and say “I am sorry—forgive me.” This is called repentance. This leads to the restoring of relationship, and collaboration can happen.

Can you think of one conflict you have had with someone that did not involve a struggle over a competing goal or interest? Yes/No (Explain.)

As honestly as you can, list some of the reasons and “root causes,” that contributed to some of your past conflicts ending badly.

ROLEPLAY:

Read the following conversation between a husband and wife, and answer the questions that follow:

HUSBAND: Did you buy another pair of shoes?

WIFE: They were a pair I had been looking for.

HUSBAND: You know we can't afford another pair.

WIFE: Oh, but you can buy a new fishing rod?!

HUSBAND: I needed one. Fishing is my only hobby. But you buy new shoes every week.

WIFE: And all you do is think about yourself and what you want.

Conflicts spiral out of control when one person is not sensitive to, or understanding of, the other and is focused only on his or her own interests and desires.

What were some of the things the husband and wife did that resulted in their conversation becoming combative and in danger of spiraling out of control?

What could some of the underlying causes be that contributed to them ending up in conflict with each other?

What might some of the root causes or "sin factors" have been that allowed their conversation to become a conflict?

Read Proverbs 16:18

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

How could pride or arrogance lead someone to destruction?

How can a person’s need to feel “respected” be an expression of pride or ego?

How can unhealthy competition contribute to conflict?

Read Psalm 73:6

Therefore, pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.

How might someone wear pride as a necklace, and how could doing so lead to conflict or even violence?

Read James 4:1-2.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

Rewrite these two verses in your own words.

As you look back on your life, what has most often led you to being quarrelsome with others? What were you desiring?

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

- *How has pride or self-centredness played a role in past conflicts in your life?*
- *How can fear lead to conflict or make conflict more difficult to resolve?*
- *When do you think conflict is “sinful” or unhealthy? When is it healthy?*
- *Are you likely to fight or take flight in a conflict? Are there steps you can take to avoid these reactions?*