

# MODULE 4: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

## SESSION 4: EXAMPLES OF RESOLVING CONFLICT

In this session we will be exploring examples of conflicts from the Bible and how they were resolved.

### Key Ideas for This Session:

- Understanding yourself and your natural responses is helpful in managing conflict.
- Applying Biblical wisdom is a discipline. It can be learned and continuously honed.
- Key verse: Matthew 5:9:  
*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

Think back to a recent conflict that ended badly. Briefly describe the conflict, including what you think you may have done wrong and what the “real” conflict was actually about.

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Which of the five following responses describes how you responded to the conflict? (Circle one.)

Competing	Accommodating	Avoiding	Collaborating	Compromising
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Looking back, is there another response that would have led to a more positive result? (Explain.)

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Read the two examples of conflict below. Describe the conflict and indicate which of the five responses above best describe the response to the conflict.

1) Abram and Lot need to divide up their land. Their families had gotten too big, they were living on top of each other, and they were bickering. They needed to spread out.

Genesis 13

*So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. <sup>2</sup> Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. <sup>3</sup> From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier <sup>4</sup> and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the Lord.*

*<sup>5</sup> Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. <sup>6</sup> But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. <sup>7</sup> And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.*

*<sup>8</sup> So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. <sup>9</sup> Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."*

*<sup>10</sup> Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) <sup>11</sup> So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: <sup>12</sup> Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. <sup>13</sup> Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.*

*14 The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring<sup>[a]</sup> forever. 16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. 17 Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."*

*18 So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the Lord.*

Who was having the conflict?

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What was at stake?

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How was it resolved?

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Did either of the parties execute a Biblical response? (E.g., grace, wisdom, "Fruits of the Spirit"—described in Galatians 5:22-23.)

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2) Nehemiah needed to solve a conflict between the people and their Jewish leaders. Because of a famine, the people were running out of food. They were borrowing money from the Jewish nobility to buy grain and then going into major debt to pay the King's taxes. The debt was becoming so high that many of the children were being sold into slavery to pay it.

Nehemiah 5:1-13

*Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. <sup>2</sup> Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain."*

*<sup>3</sup> Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine."*

*<sup>4</sup> Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. <sup>5</sup> Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."*

*<sup>6</sup> When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. <sup>7</sup> I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are charging your own people interest!" So I called together a large meeting to deal with them <sup>8</sup> and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.*

*<sup>9</sup> So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? <sup>10</sup> I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! <sup>11</sup> Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil."*

*<sup>12</sup> "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say."*

*Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. <sup>13</sup> I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, "In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!" At this the whole assembly said, "Amen," and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.*

What was the issue? Who was the conflict between?

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What were the different positive things Nehemiah did to solve the conflict?

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The apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthian church, addressed the fact that the members of the community lacked wisdom to resolve their disputes. Christians had begun to go to court to bring lawsuits against other believers. So, Paul wrote this:

1 Corinthians 6:7-8

*The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means that you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brother.*

What do you think Paul is saying?

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Now let's practice. Here are some typical real-life scenarios that can lead to conflict. For each of these scenarios, please consider the following:

- What is the conflict about?
- What are the barriers to a resolution?

- Is there something you need to take responsibility for?
- Do you need more empathy for the other person?
- Do you need to forgive or be forgiven?
- How can you avoid fight or flight instincts? Anger eruptions?
- Is there a way for compromise and collaboration?
- How can you be a peacemaker?
- Are you grounded in an understanding of the Biblical response and if yes, what is it in this situation? (E.g., grace, peace, patience, self-control)

**SCENARIO 1**

Your boss is under pressure and is making demands on you that are very difficult or impossible. Your co-worker is also “slacking off” and causing you problems in getting your own work done.

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**SCENARIO 2**

You are living with your brother’s family. Their parenting style is very free, and you believe the behaviour of their young kids is inappropriate. They stay up as late as they like, they come in and out of your room uninvited, and they never put anything they are using away.

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### SCENARIO 3

You and your partner are disagreeing on where to live. One of you wants to spend more money on a nicer place. The other wants to save money for a better vehicle.

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### SCENARIO 4

Your elderly father has just died. Your mother died five years ago. You have a brother and a sister, and between you there are seven grandchildren. Both your mom and dad collected family “treasures” and never seemed to be able to throw anything away. Their family home is full of all kinds of trinkets and treasures that represent many good memories for you and other members of the family.

Among the many items is your mother’s treasured silver tea pot that she received as a wedding gift. She used that tea pot every Sunday afternoon when friends and family came together for lunch. In the living room is a framed collection of your father’s and grandfather’s medals from the World Wars. Both were honoured for their bravery and service. Those medals are collector’s items and could be worth a lot of money. You have many childhood memories of listening to your father and grandfather tell stories about their war experiences. You always admired their medals and thought that you would love to pass them and the stories on to your own children.

Your brother is in financial trouble right now. He was laid off from his job when the factory closed and has moved the family three times in the last five years as he was looking for a new job. He thinks everything including the house left by Mom and Dad should be sold and the money divided among the family. This

seems fair to him, and besides, he doesn't care about having more stuff to move from place to place. The extra money would be a huge help to his family.

Your sister is having a hard time with your father's death. She took care of him during his long illness, and it was hard on her. Neither you or your brother were able to be around much. Now with both Mom and Dad gone, your sister is feeling a huge emptiness in her heart. She is upset that anyone would even be thinking about selling off the family things.

This situation has become increasingly tense due to the conflicting expectations and desires of the surviving family members. It is impossible to say whose interests are better or more important than another's. It is the kind of situation that is "ripe" for serious conflict and could break up the remaining family, leaving many hard feelings.

Assuming you are one of the three family members (two brothers and a sister) what are some questions you could ask yourself in trying to achieve a positive outcome?

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What do you think your goal(s) will be in dealing with this situation?

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Conflict is unavoidable as we live in relationship with one another. The Biblical response to conflict is clearly spelled out in Scripture and ultimately serves very positive ends. The Biblical response involves pursuing peace and reconciliation. We are called to solve conflicts in good time (not letting things fester). We are required to take responsibility for our part in a conflict and to approach the other person in love, to show his/her fault. We are asked to forgive as God has forgiven us.

How can your approach to conflict glorify God and reflect His character?

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

- *1 Corinthians 10:13 "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." Memorize this verse and consider its implications in your daily life.*
- *Write out a conflict you have had recently. Analyse what went well and what didn't. Include in your analysis, what you will do differently the next time you have a conflict.*