**Conflict Resolution**

**Prodigal Message 7**

**Memory Verse**:

**John 13:34-35** “A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

*When joining my current church years ago, I was in an introductory class. An elder and close friend was leading the class. He was someone I greatly respect and he said something that really got my attention. “I helps me to remember that conflict is an opportunity to glorify God”. He then went on to state that the handout on dealing with conflict Biblically is something that he carried with him at all times; in his briefcase, his desk at work and at home. I thought that strange but I have come to see the incredible value and power of dealing with conflict directly, quickly and Biblically when indicated. I now have a copy of that very document, the same one given to every participant in Prodigal, with me at all times.*

**Introduction: Conflict is an Opportunity**

Addressing conflict in a biblical way is an opportunity to glorify God, serve others, and become more like Christ. If done correctly, it is a surprisingly effective tool for strengthening and deepening personal relationships. Make no mistake, dealing with conflict is hard. As a result, many people try to avoid it at all costs, which can fuel misunderstanding and lead to damaged and broken relationships. However, we are guided by Matthew 18 and must deal with conflict immediately, authentically, and honestly with a heart to love our neighbor. This process is empowered by a relationship with and a focus on the work of Jesus Christ in our own lives. We must view others as He views us.

**He is Our Peace**

 Conflict is almost always caused by someone’s selfishness and is often complicated by misunderstanding. We must see the situation as Christ calls us to see it, as a forgiven servant and one who loves our neighbor as our self (Matt. 22:37-40). We can only love our neighbor truly as much as we love our self if we realize that our identity is in Christ’s love for us alone. Our identity is not in our personal belongings or reputation or power. It is in Christ alone. Our Personal Mission Statement (PMS) guides us as a reminder of what we are called to be and do (Matt.5:43-44,

John 13:34-35). Successful biblical conflict resolution simply starts with Jesus Christ. This concept is supported in **Ephesians 2:14-16** *For he himself is our peace, who made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility*

*“We want to start by clearing up only the results of conflict. God never starts there; He starts with the person. He says peace is a Person, and in order for you to live at peace with someone else, then you must be at peace with the person of Jesus Christ.”*

 Ray Steadman

Agreeing not to fight is not peace. Jesus did not avoid conflict and pointed out tough choices for people. He pointed out faults in their lives, which led to tremendous conflict. (see Pharisees, Rich young ruler Matt 19:16-22, woman at the well John 4:7-26) For those who worked through this well, they found satisfying , permanent and genuine peace. If you are right with Jesus, you should be able to work through any conflict optimally and in a God-honoring way. This may seem like an overstatement, but it is not. No marriage should end in divorce if both parties are equally yoked as believers and are fully devoted followers of Christ. *It is our selfish human nature that negatively impacts relationships.*

**Check Your Motives in any Conflict**

 With your PMS in mind, your motive should be for reconciliation. Your motive cannot be for revenge or to prove your point or to prove you are right. The latter improper motives are driven by pride and selfishness and not by a Godly purpose to love both your enemies and your neighbor. See the following scriptures that help solidify this point:

* + Hebrews 12:14-15 “Make every effort to live at peace with all men and to be holy…See to it that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”
	+ Romans 12:18-19 “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath…”

**Source(s) of Conflict**

 In order to successfully work through conflict, it is very helpful to identify the root cause of the issue at hand. James 4:1-4 speaks to this source in a powerful way:

*“What causes fights and quarrels among you? You want something, but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask God, you ask with wrong motives that you may spend on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?”*

If we have idols in our lives, conflict will be the result when people tread on those idols. It is helpful to identify the idols in our lives that cause conflict and eliminate them. The only thing in life we should worship is God. If that is our perspective, it is amazing how conflict will diminish in our lives by minimizing the root causes. If we place money, respect, love of others, love of children above love for God then conflict is more likely to occur.

**Get the Log out of Your Own Eye**

 We have learned in other lessons in Prodigal that you can only control yourself. Therefore, in any conflict, a good place to start is by looking honestly at yourself. You should ask yourself if there are any issues you need to own in this conflict. If so, you should deal with them first. Community can play a valuable part in this analysis by sharpening you in this area before the conflict resolution even begins.

Matthew 7:1-5

*“Do not judge so that you will not be judged … Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?…. You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye so you can see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”*

If you do have issues you need to own, there are key points to remember (the 7 A’s) in acknowledging them and owning them before others:

* Address everyone involved
* Avoid excuses
* Admit specifically
* Apologize sincerely
* Accept the consequences
* Alter your behavior
* Ask for forgiveness

It is most common in giving an apology to say “I’m sorry”. That might be helpful, but it is very important to realize that statement is not enough. It is more powerful to ask for forgiveness. This is the most humble approach and sends a powerful message to those you are in conflict with that you are seeking reconciliation, not just wanting to get this conflict to “go away”. Conflict needs to be fully resolved and will ideally result in reconciliation. Humble acknowledgement of your own issues is a great way to start the process.

**What issues are worthy of addressing in a conflict?**

Proverbs 19:11 states, “A man’s wisdom gives him patience and it is to his glory to overlook an offense.”

 So which offenses can be overlooked? How can we know which offenses to address? If Matthew 22:37-40 is our guide in this, we might ask 4 questions in relation to any issue. If the answer is “yes” to any of the following, then they do need to be addressed in order to love God and love your neighbor in a way that glorifies Him.

* + Is it hurting others?
	+ Is it hurting the individual?
	+ Is it dishonoring God?
	+ Is it damaging relationships?

**Biblical Conflict Resolution**

The mechanics of Conflict Resolution are marked out clearly in Matthew 18:15-17

1. Talk face to face, one on one. Admit your own part, but go and show your brother his sins with patience, gentleness, and love (Matt 18:15, Gal. 6:1).
2. If #1 fails, then take someone with you (Matt. 18:16).
3. If #1 and #2 fail, then widen your circle and tell the church (Matt. 18:17).

If this 3 fold approach fails to resolve the conflict and the party refuses to submit to the authority of the biblical wisdom of the Elders /Church then you “treat them as a non-believer”. Although this may seem harsh, realize that this is a lengthy detailed process that gives the offender ample opportunity to repent.

 *Also remember how we should treat non believers*. We always **love them** and simply **call them to repentance**. We don't hate them, judge them, or ostracize them. Always be willing to revisit the issue and be willing to continue to pursue Biblical conflict resolution if that occurs.

**Finish Well**

If conflict has been resolved, then finish well. Closure will only occur through true forgiveness. We must not dwell on the incident, control our tongue by not talking to others about it and move on. IF we have resolved the conflict in an open, sincere, and honest way, then this incident should not stand in the way of future relationship. In fact, if done well, it should strengthen it, to God’s glory.

 If conflict is unresolved due to the other party’s willingness to heed wise counsel, then realize that you are not judged on outcome (Prov. 21:31). You are not responsible for someone else’s unrepentant heart (Ezekiel 33:1-10).

 The best way to navigate the waters of conflict is the same way we should navigate every day of our lives. We should simply **abide in Christ.** If we attempt to accomplish anything apart from Christ, then it will not bear fruit. Apart from Christ we can do nothing (John 15:4-5). Our dependence on Him is never more evident than when attempting to resolve conflict in a biblical way that restores relationships and brings God glory.

**Key Principles**

1. **Addressing conflict in a biblical way is an opportunity to glorify God, serve others, and become more like Christ.**
2. **Successful biblical conflict resolution must start with Jesus Christ.**
3. **If those in conflict are in right relationships with Jesus Christ, then any conflict can be resolved to God’s glory.**
4. **Our motive in resolving conflict must be for reconciliation, not revenge.**
5. **You should always look at your part first in any conflict, and you should own it, and address it in an honest, humble way, asking for forgiveness for your offense.**
6. **Once you have determined that an issue is worth pursuing, you should follow the guidelines of Matt. 18:15-17.**