

## How to Resolve Conflict

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Sterling UMC  
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James 4:1-6

This morning I want to continue our series on Building Strong Families. My message this morning is somewhat of a continuation of last week's theme. Last week we talked about handling anger in our home. This morning I want to go a step farther and work some on the root cause of anger, and discuss conflict.

Jesus, one time, in giving an illustration about the home talked about the danger of conflict in the home. Mark 3:25 (LB), "*A home filled with strife and division destroys itself.*" There's a real danger with conflict. Conflict when it is not dealt with and handled appropriately can kill a marriage, it can ruin relationships. Now as I said last week in any human relationship conflict is inevitable. You're going to have conflict because we are all imperfect and sinful human beings. We can be selfish. We can be prideful. We can be mean. We can be hurtful. We can be inconsiderate. We can be impatient. All of these things can lead to conflict. We know it's going to happen, we need to get ready for it. That's what we're going to do today. We're going to take a few minutes to take a look at what the Bible has to say on how we understand conflict and resolve it in our lives.

These are principles that we're going to focus on work in any relationship. All relationships involve conflict. There are three things we need to understand to help us overcome that conflict.

- The reason for conflict
- How we respond to conflict
- How to resolve conflict

Let's look at each of them individually.

### I. THE REASON FOR CONFLICT

If you're going to overcome conflict in your life you have to understand first of all the reason for it, why is it's there. The Bible is very clear about this, it's almost blunt. James 4:1 (NCV), "*Do you know where your fights and arguments come from? They come from the selfish desires that war within you.*" That's where they come from. That's why we all face conflict as a part of our human nature. Competing desires, I want what I want, and you want what you want.

We can see this even in the little things of life. This is why they have duel controls on electric blankets. We compete over the tiniest things. Should towels be folded in half or thirds. Should the toilet paper loop over or under. All of these things become huge issues. Why? Because we're different. Conflict is inevitable.

In any relationship, when my needs and expectations go unmet conflict rears its ugly head. In any marriage, in any family, in any relationship the reason for conflict is our

competing desires. Once you understand that, you're ready to take a look at how to respond to the conflict that happens in our hearts.

## II. HOW WE RESPOND TO CONFLICT

As we look at these responses let me remind you of the verse in Psalm 139:23 (LB). David wrote, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart and test my thoughts.*" Whenever I try to start thinking about what's the reason I do something, this is a prayer that I pray. "Lord, would You help me to understand myself." I realize I don't understand myself a lot of times. I need His help. With His help let's look at some of the reasons for conflict in our lives, why it happens and five responses to conflict that come out of the selfish desires we have.

1. My way. That's when you say "When I face conflict, I'm going to get my way. I'm 100% right, 100% of the time. I'm going to fight. I'm going to do whatever it takes, whatever battle I have to go through to make sure I get what I want." Many of you, that's how you respond to conflict.

2. No way. When conflict comes into your life, you just start to back off. "I don't want to face this conflict." You'll do anything and everything you can to make sure that the argument doesn't happen. Your rule is to avoid conflict at all costs. But you still have it, you still face it. Eventually, the result of this is that nothing is ever resolved and eventually it still catch up with you.

3. Your way. Whenever we face a conflict we just say, "Have it your way", "I'll always give in to you", "I want your approval", or "I hate conflict." You sort of roll over and play dead. Whatever they want, they get. If you use this method in dealing with conflict, what's happening is within you there is a swell of bitterness growing day by day. It can grow for days and months and years. But eventually it's going to explode.

4. Half way. "Ok, you've got your idea, I've got my idea, let's compromise. You win some of the time, I win some of the time. We'll try to meet half way. Win some/lose some." This is better than the first three but it's still not the best way to deal with conflict.

5. Our way. We recognize that I have needs and you have needs and there is a way for us to talk together so that our needs can be met in ways they never could have been met before. Instead of just taking half and half, we try to put our whole together and find something better that we could have ever found before. You could also call this God's Way. God taught us through Jesus Christ how to care about another person's needs and how to care about a relationship enough that I'm just not trying to get my way and meet half way, but we work on it together.

We're going to talk today how we can head towards this last way of dealing with relationships.

## III. HOW DO YOU RESOLVE CONFLICTS

What are the practical steps that the Bible speaks about that help us to resolve the conflicts in our lives? Some of you, when you have conflict in your home, it's like a war zone. Some of you, it's more like a stage and you're actors on a stage -- always playing the same parts again and again. Some of you it's like a courtroom -- stating your points, it's all real controlled.

Today, as we take a look at these principles I want to help you lay down the weapons, take off the masks, lay aside all the legalities that may be a part of your relationship and define a new way to deal with conflict that helps those conflicts to be resolved, helps God's peace and love become part of your life.

1. Become a believer. Commit your life to Jesus Christ. Begin by resolving your conflict with God. The Bible says that before we come to Jesus Christ we're in conflict with God. You may feel it or not feel it but it says we're in conflict with God. We have our way and we're going to do it our way, even though He has a different way. We're separate from Him. Jesus Christ came to this world to make peace between humanity and God, to solve that conflict. This is the key place to begin in resolving conflict in all of our relationships.

*Ephesians 2:16 "As parts of the same body, our anger against each other has disappeared. For both of us have been reconciled to God and so the feud ended at the cross."* The battle was won at the cross. The feud ended, the separation was bridged. God's able to solve the conflicts in our lives. Many marriage conflicts could be solved overnight, if both husband and wife would come to know Christ because of the power that He has to solve those conflicts we face in our lives.

This is the most practical advice I could give you. My relationship to Jesus Christ more than anything else sets the tone for the ability to handle the conflicts that I face. He gives me the ability to think in a different way and relate in a different way. Finding the love of Christ helps us find the forgiveness in our lives that builds the foundation of strength for all other relationships. Finding the love of Christ also gives us the strength to forgive others. If you're going to solve conflicts you've got to have that strength.

Begin with your relationship with Jesus Christ. Then He'll give you the strength to move on to the second point.

2. Talk to God about the conflict. Pray. Before you talk to the other person about it, talk to God about it. In fact, that may resolve it right there! You may find it's mostly your problem anyway.

You see we all need to learn to ventilate vertically. We're real good at ventilating horizontally at all the people around us. But before you do that, ventilate vertically. David was very good at this. When you read the book of Psalms, he did a lot of this. He told God when he was ticked off! He told Him everything he was feeling. Then he would go and talk to others about it. If you and I could do that, we could solve many of our problems with others. Talk to God about the problem.

James 1:5 talks about God's ability to make a difference in the way we talk about our problems. When I have a problem I can ask Him to help me solve it. *"If you want to*

*know what God wants you to do ask Him and He will gladly tell you."* God wants to help us. We just need to talk to Him about the problems that we're facing in our lives.

3. Change your focus. What are you focusing on? Change your focus from my needs to their needs. Philippians 2:3-5 (LB), *"Don't be selfish. Don't just think about your own affairs but be interested in others' too, in what they are doing. Your attitude should be the kind that was shown us by Jesus Christ."*

Let's get honest. When you get angry, when you're in the middle of a conflict, you're preoccupied with yourself, aren't you? What are my needs and how am I going to get these needs met? I've found that if somehow God gets it into my little brain, just five seconds of the thought, "Think about her needs" and I can take just a moment to do that, it changes the entire complexion of the argument. Christ can give us the strength to do that. He's the one who gives us the power to change our focus. We need to seek to understand not just to be understood.

Jesus talked about the importance of this in Matthew 7:3,5 (NCV). He gave us a picture of how important this is. *"Why do you notice the little piece of dust in your friend's eye, but you don't notice the big piece of wood in your own eye. First, take the wood out of your own eye and then you will clearly see to take the dust out of your friend's eye."*

Jesus is saying before you even begin, first ask yourself, "Am I at fault at all here?" Even if it's a little speck in your eye it's going to create a blind spot. We all have blind spots. None of us are perfect. Ask yourself if you're being unrealistic. Am I being oversensitive? Am I being too demanding? Am I being insensitive or ungrateful? Our blind spots keep us from seeing their needs.

Change your focus from what's my need to what's their need.

There's a fourth key to solving the conflict in our lives.

#### 4. ESTABLISH GROUND RULES

Even countries make arms treaties with one another. They get together in a battle, a war. The worst of enemies say, "There are certain weapons that are out of bounds. Certain weapons we won't use." They know that those weapons, if used, would destroy both sides. There are certain things in communication that are out of bounds. They destroy both sides.

Ephesians 4:31 *"Stop being mean, bad tempered and angry, quarreling, harsh words and the dislike of others should have no place in our lives."* If you look closely at this verse it helps us to recognize that these ground rules are based on the one characteristic God wants us to have in our life.

Instead of being mean, be kind.

Instead of being bad tempered, be patient.

Instead of anger, try honesty and love.

Instead of harsh words, use gentle words.

I know this is where we all live in the struggle. Practical idea:

One of ground rules is this: attack the problem and not the person. Sometimes when you know you're losing an argument you start bringing in the big artillery. The old things. The in-laws. Attack the problem and not the person. Lucy said in *Peanuts* cartoon when she was talking about this, "If I can't be right, I'm going to be wrong at the top of my lungs." Sometimes we do that. We start to attack more and more.

Old Proverb that says, "When you throw mud you lose ground."

## 5. GO AND MAKE PEACE.

If you're going to resolve a conflict the key point is go and make peace. Matthew 5:23-24 (NCV), "*So when you offer your gift to God at the altar and you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go and make peace with that person and then come and offer your gift.*" Conflict is not resolved accidentally. It has to be deliberately dealt with. Go and make peace, not just be willing to wait until they come and make peace with you, but you go and make peace. Not go and make excuses or go and make your point. Go and make peace. Jesus shows us that the only way to resolve a conflict is to face a conflict. That's tough but that's the way to get resolved.

Choose the right time. Choose the right place. And go and make peace.

## 6. ASK FOR ADVICE

Some of you are stuck and you feel like, "I don't know how to get through this wall." If that's true, it's OK to bring in a third party. It's OK to ask for advice. Talk to God about it, then find someone; a friend, a family member or even an expert who can help you.

Proverbs 13:10 "*Pride leads to arguments. Be humble take advice and become wise.*" Advice is the path to wisdom.

In every other area in our lives when we face big problems we're not afraid to get professional help. If we're sick physically we're going to go to a doctor. If I've got a financial problem I can't figure out, I'm going to go to a CPA. If I've got some legal problems and I don't know what to do, I'm going to go see a lawyer. If you've got some relationship problems in your marriage or in your family, there is nothing wrong with going and seeing a professional counselor, somebody who has the tools to help you see how to marriage and how to handle conflict.

These principles that we looked at today are six proven principles on resolving conflict in relationships. From the simplest little conflict to a conflict you may have been facing for years. Use them in your life.

Take a look at these six principles. I'd like to put alongside of them three resolutions for solving conflict. Three commitments you can make in your life.

1. I resolve to commit my life to Jesus Christ. You may have never done that. That is the first and most important point. That's where you start. Tell Him you need Him. We all need Jesus. I need Jesus Christ in my relationships. I'm not afraid to

admit that. That's why He came for us, that's why He loves us. Ask for His help. Ask Him to forgive you for the wrongs you've done and give you direction for everyday life. He's promised He will.

2. I resolve to commit my attitudes to Jesus Christ. You may have given your life to Christ but your attitudes have been crummy lately. There's been a lot of "my way" stuff. He can help you. If you commit your attitudes to Him, He can teach you how. Day by day. Moment by moment.

3. I resolve to commit my words to Jesus Christ, the way I talk to others. To let Him help me begin to talk in a more gentle way, in a more clear way and a more loving way or maybe just to begin to talk at all. Ask for His help in that.

If we will make and fulfill these commitments and truly strive to live them out in our daily life, it will change our lives, it will change our marriages, it will change our homes, it will change our families, and it will change our church.