

Christians in Conflict

A Bible Study About Peacemaking

An Adult Bible Study

by

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Lesson One

What Causes Conflict?

Worship

Leader: In his Word, God warns us not to let our anger lead us into sin.

Group: Instead, when we are on our beds, he urges us,

L: “In silence search your hearts.”

G: We pray, O Lord, let the light of your face shine on us.

L: You have filled our hearts with joy. We lie down and sleep in peace.

G: You alone, O Lord, make us live in safety.

Based on Psalm 4

1.1 “Not Good!”

1. Describe a relationship in your life that you cherish as a very special blessing.

Read Genesis chapter 1 and 2:18.

2. A common refrain echoes through the verses of Genesis chapter 1: “The light was good. . . . It was good. . . . It was good. . . . It was good. . . . God saw that it was good. . . . It was very good.” Contrast that with Genesis 2:18.
3. After seven emphatic repetitions of the thought that all things were “good” or “very good,” what is the significance of the “not good” in chapter 2, verse 18?
4. How did the fall into sin spoil the blessings God intended for all human relationships?

1.2 Cain and Abel

Read Genesis 4:1-15.

5. What was Cain’s underlying problem?

6. Evaluate: In his rising conflict, Cain focused on the wrong target for his anger.

7. When we are in conflict with others, we often set ourselves up as judge and jury (and judge others harshly) in order to justify our anger and our own loveless actions. Demonstrate how such judging contributed to Cain's downfall.

8. Agree or Disagree: There is some of both Cain and Abel in each of us. (Also see **Galatians 5:17-26.**)

1.3 The Four Stages of Conflict

As conflict developed in the relationship between Cain and his brother Abel, it passed through several stages, or phases. Though each conflict situation is unique, certain phases are commonly observed in conflicted relationships.

Read James 4:1-3.

9. To what does the apostle James point as the source of all conflict?

10. What distinguishes godly wanting from sinful wanting?

11. Evaluate: Anyone who stands in the way of me getting what I want is a potential enemy.

STAGE ONE

I obsess over (or fixate on) my own selfish desires and interests.
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Read Galatians 6:3-5.

12. In what ways can we deceive ourselves when we set our own selfish agendas?

STAGE TWO

I distort the truth about myself or my adversary to suit my own selfish agenda.

13. What are some devious ways to twist the truth about an enemy to put that person in a bad light?

Read James 4:11,12.

14. What really is going on when we judge an enemy?

STAGE THREE

I self-righteously judge the behaviors, words, or motives of my enemy.

15. Evaluate: There is nothing wrong with judging a wrongdoer.

In the fourth and final stage, our wrongheaded judgments give way to punishing the enemy.

Read Genesis 16:1-6.

16. Look for examples of the various stages of conflict in this triangular conflict involving Sarai, Hagar, and Abram.

STAGE FOUR

I punish others who dare to oppose me, even as I have judged them.

17. *Dysfunctional* is a popular term used to describe a unit of society (such as a family) that is no longer able to function as a unit. In your opinion, why are conflict and dysfunction frequently connected?

1.4 The Don't-Let-the-Sun-Set-on-Your-Anger Principle**Read Ephesians 4:26.**

18. The Bible tells us that a growing conflict is an urgent matter that requires immediate attention. Early intervention might have been able to keep

the situation in Abram’s household from spinning out of control and into a costly conflict.

Consider *when*, *how*, and *who* should have stepped in to correct the course of this growing conflict.

Read Matthew 5:22-24.

19. Why does God place such urgency on resolving disputes as soon as possible?

The Don’t-Let-the-Sun-Set-on-Your-Anger Principle

Conflict is an urgent matter. Make it a priority to seek healing for a broken relationship.

Closing Prayer

In the light of the discussions we have had in Lesson One, what thoughts would you like to include in our closing prayer?

Lesson Two

How We Deal With Conflict

Worship

Leader: O Lord our God, if there is guilt on our hands,

Group: If we have done evil to the person who is at peace with us,

L: Make us sleep in the dust.

G: Arise, O Lord, in your anger; rise up against the rage of our enemies.

L: Awake, O Lord, and decree justice.

G: Judge us, O Lord, according to our righteousness.

Based on Psalm 7

2.1 Two Ways of Being

Read Proverbs 14:30.

1. According to the inspired writer, what undermines a heart at peace?
2. Is it possible to have a heart that is at peace in some relationships and to have bones rotting with envy in other relationships?

Read 1 Samuel 18:6-11 and 1 Samuel 24:1-15.

3. From this account, give an illustration of an at-peace heart and an at-war heart.
4. What is perhaps the strongest evidence that David's heart was at peace in his relationship with Saul?
5. Create two lists—one for things associated with the attitude that comes with an at-peace heart and the other for things associated with the attitude that comes with a heart at war. Discuss the lists and the results of the two attitudes.

Read Romans 14:19.

6. What natural connection exists between *peace* and the attitude that seeks to *build one another up*?

2.2 How We Respond to Conflict



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7. Ten of these responses to conflict are listed below. Match each conflict response to a Bible reading in the chart on the next page. Offer a simple definition for each term. Then answer the questions that follow. (Hint: Use all ten words. There are no duplicates.)

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| assault | arbitration |
| negotiation | murder |
| overlooking | suicide |
| mediation | litigation |
| flight | denial |

Text(s)	Response	Definition
Genesis 4:2-16		
Matthew 5:25,40		
1 Kings 3:16-28		
John 18:10		
John 8:33-40		
Genesis 18:20-33		
1 Samuel 31:1-6		
Romans 15:1; 1 Peter 4:8		
Mark 14:46-52		
Genesis 13:5-11		

8. Which of these responses to conflict are generally unproductive?
9. How does denial stand out as a particularly dangerous response to conflict?
10. While they do not always represent perfect resolutions to conflict, what attitude should a Christian have with regard to *negotiation*, *mediation*, and *arbitration*?

Closing Prayer

As you reflect on what we have discussed in Lesson Two, what thoughts would you like to see included in our closing prayer?

Lesson Three

The Most Excellent Way

Worship

Leader: Purify us with hyssop, and we will be clean;

Group: Wash us, and we will be cleaner than newly fallen snow.

L: Let us hear joy and gladness; grant that the bones you have crushed may rejoice.

G: Create pure hearts within us, O God, and give us unwavering spirits.

L: Don't cast us from your presence or take your Holy Spirit away from us.

G: Restore the joy of your salvation to us.

Based on Psalm 51

3.1 The If-Your-Brother-Sins-Against-You Principle

Read Matthew 18:12-17.

1. How does the parable of the wandering sheep help us understand Jesus' strategy toward a brother or sister who sins?

2. What attitudes drive each step in this process?

The If-Your-Brother-Sins-Against-You Principle

Out of love for a fellow Christian who is caught in a sin, one should first speak privately with the individual. If the person repents, a lost soul will have been saved. If the individual remains unrepentant, take two or three other Christians with you to serve as witnesses. If the person still remains unrepentant, take the matter to the church and treat the individual as you would treat an unbeliever. But do this, remembering that Jesus reached out to sinners and unbelievers; do not hate or despise the unrepentant sinner. Reach out to him or her with God's Word in the hope that this person may repent and again become your brother or sister in faith.

3.2 Reconciliation: The Perfect Response

Read Colossians 1:21,22.

3. Our sinful nature is in conflict with God. What is the result of that conflict?
4. Evaluate: The news about Christ's life on earth, sacrificial death on a cross, and victory over the grave is good news for all people, yet it is a very personal message for every believer.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-20.

5. What makes God's approach to reconciling a sinful and rebellious world to himself so radically different from the world's approach to resolving conflict?
6. Under inspiration from God, the apostle Paul wrote that as a result of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection, we no longer regard anyone from a worldly point of view. What is the difference between the way a redeemed child of God looks at others compared to the way worldly minded people look at others?
7. What privileged new role has been given to us by virtue of the reconciliation that Christ has won for us?

3.3 Joseph and His Brothers

Read Genesis 37:17,26-28; 45:3-8; and 50:15-21.

8. Why might we expect Joseph to have been bitter and filled with hatred for his brothers?
9. How do we know that Joseph forgave his brothers?
10. Did the forgiveness Joseph extended to his brothers have any strings attached?
11. In what ways does this story remind you of the story of your own reconciliation with God?

3.4 Nathan's Intervention

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-23.

12. With whom was David in conflict, and what was the cause of his conflict?

13. How would you characterize Nathan's approach to confronting David with his sin?

14. Evaluate Nathan's approach to dealing with David's sin and the conflicts it was causing. Was his approach appropriate for David's sin?

Closing Prayer

Consider the main points that were covered in Lesson Three. Suggest a few thoughts from the lesson that could be incorporated into our closing prayer.

Lesson Four

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Worship

Leader: The people who walked in darkness have seen a magnificent light;
Group: They rejoice in front of you as people rejoice during the harvest.

L: For a child is born to us, to us a son is given,
G: The government will be on his shoulders.

L: We will call him Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
G: Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Based on Isaiah chapter 9

4.1 David Repents

Read 2 Samuel 12:13-23.

1. When confronted with Nathan's parable, how did David express his remorse?
2. Why do you think it took David so long to finally admit his sins?
3. Why is it so difficult for us to look into the mirror of God's law?
4. How do you explain David's unexpected behavior after the child of this illicit affair had died?

4.2 The Lost Son

Read Luke 15:10-32.

5. What examples of *repentance*, *confession*, *absolution*, and *restoration* did you find in the story?

6. Why did the father decide to celebrate?

Read James 5:16.

7. Many of our liturgical orders of worship include a public confession of sins. What benefits are there in also practicing some form of private confession? (See *Christian Worship*, pp. 154,155, for a simple format for Private Confession.)
8. Does your church encourage this practice? If not, discuss whether there might be some value in reinstating the practice.

4.3 The Restore-and-Rejoice Principle

Read Luke 15:8-10 and then 15:1-7.

9. Both passages speak of rejoicing among the angels over a sinner who repents. Certainly it is appropriate to celebrate God's grace. What benefits are there for us as we celebrate God's grace in bringing a sinner to repentance? What could happen if we fail to take the time and make the effort to celebrate God's grace?
10. Celebrations that mark birthdays, anniversaries, or other special events often include food, gatherings of friends and relatives for some kind of announcement or acknowledgement, special music or dancing, and displays of physical objects (such as candles or wedding paraphernalia) that help people focus on the event. What features of such celebrations suggest ways we might celebrate the return of a straying sinner into Jesus' sheepfold?

The Restore-and-Rejoice Principle

When a brother or sister repents, the body of believers joins in celebrating God's grace. This celebration also marks the repentant sinner's full restoration to family status in God's household of faith.

4.4 The Feast That Celebrates Peace

Read 1 Corinthians 10:16,17.

11. The "one loaf" in verse 17 expresses unity. What relationship is there between this *one loaf* and the Lord's Supper?

12. What does this tell us about our relationships with other believers?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:2.

13. What does this text say about our relationship with Christ?

Read Matthew 11:28.

14. Of what promise does the Sacrament reassure us?

Read Colossians 2:6,7.

15. What other benefits does the Sacrament promise to give us?

Closing Prayer

Consider the main points that we covered in Lesson Four, and say a silent prayer that expresses your thoughts from this lesson.

Lesson Five

Peacemaking and Faith

Worship

Leader: I listen to what the Lord says; he promises peace to his people.

Group: Let them not return to their foolish ways.

L: Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,

G: That his glory may inhabit our land.

L: Steadfast love and faithfulness meet together;

G: Righteousness and peace kiss each other.

Based on Psalm 85

5.1 A Model From Matthew 18

Read Matthew 18:1-4.

1. Which of Jesus' words tell us that this lesson is vitally important for all of us?
2. What claims to greatness (or at least to the kind of *greatness* that the disciples understood) could the little child make?
3. What makes the idea of becoming a child again so radical?
4. What point was Jesus making here?
5. Why is it necessary to understand this if we are going to resolve conflict in our lives or help others resolve conflict?
6. Why do you think it is so important to have a strong, childlike faith when conflict threatens?

5.2 Paul's Power Formula

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-10.

7. What are some of the more typical reactions you and I have when we are responding to personal *weaknesses*, *insults* of others, *hardships* in life, *persecutions*, or *difficulties*?

8. How do you account for Paul's rather strange reaction to the revelation that God wasn't going to remove the thorn in his flesh?

9. How would you be inclined to apply this Bible truth to your own life?

Read Philippians 4:13.

10. How can a Christian make such an outrageous claim: to be able to do everything?

11. Realizing that through faith you are enabled to do impossible things, how can you become a better peacemaker?

Read Mark 9:17-24.

12. Why is everything possible for the person who believes?

13. As you struggle with conflict, how can your baptism and the Lord's Supper be important resources for you?

5.3 Counting the Cost

Read Matthew 16:24-26.

14. As Jesus' followers, how much of ourselves should we be prepared to give in service to him?

Read Galatians 6:1,2.

15. Evaluate (use Galatians 6:1,2 to support your answer): Being a peacemaker in Christ's army isn't for everyone.

Closing Prayer

Volunteer to lead a closing prayer that reflects some of the concepts that were discussed in Lesson Five.

Lesson Six

Equipped for Peacemaking

Worship

Leader: Behold—there on the mountains,

Group: The feet of one bringing good news

L: and proclaiming peace!

G: Celebrate your appointed feasts, O Judah,

L: For the wicked will never again invade you;

G: They will be completely destroyed.

Based on Nahum chapter 1

6.1 *The Plank-in-Your-Eye Principle*

Read Matthew 7:1-5.

1. At first glance, the two paragraphs in this text seem to contradict each other. In the first, we are warned not to judge. Yet the second speaks to us in the context of making a judgment. What is Jesus teaching us with these words?

2. Evaluate: Humility is one of the credentials necessary for being a peacemaker in Jesus' army.

The Plank-in-Your-Eye Principle

To help another Christian deal with sin, we need to be humbled by our own sins and present ourselves as sinners who have also needed to turn to God for forgiveness.

6.2 *Conflict Resolution and Management: Arbitration, Mediation, Negotiation*

arbitration _____

mediation _____

negotiation _____

Read Zechariah 7:9.

3. What attitude would we look for in anyone who is called upon to *mediate* a dispute between two warring parties?
4. Give an example of how Christians could use the tool of *negotiation* to resolve a conflict among God's people.
5. When does a negotiation strategy generally begin to break down?
6. Under what circumstances might you expect to use an arbitration strategy or a form of mediation to settle a conflict?

6.3 Public Litigation as a Conflict Management Strategy

7. Define *litigation*. _____

Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.

8. What dangers do you see in making use of *litigation* (lawsuits) to settle disputes?
9. What was Paul's point in this text?
10. Did the apostle create a new law for Christians, making it a sin to take someone to court?
11. What criteria could a Christian use to decide if taking someone to court is a God-pleasing action?

6.4 Prayer: The Indispensable Resource

Read John 15:16.

12. Explain how the fruit that a peacemaker in God's army bears is the kind of "fruit that will last"?

Read Matthew 5:38-47.

13. How do Jesus' words in Matthew 5:38-47 change your view of earthly (human) enemies?

14. Why are humble hearts necessary in order to carry out Jesus' command to pray for our enemies?

Closing Prayer

Volunteer to lead a closing prayer that reflects some of the discussions generated in Lesson Six.

Lesson Seven

Hard Teachings

Worship

Leader: Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

Group: Whoever of you delights in life

L: And desires to live a long time,

G: keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceit.

L: Turn from evil and do good;

G: Seek peace and pursue it.

Based on Psalm 34

7.1 The Don't-Judge-Others Principle

Read Matthew 7:1.

1. Is stereotyping a form of judging? How about social, ethnic, or racial prejudice?
2. Are we judging others in a sinful way when we make assumptions about the reasons for their actions based on what we think rather than on facts?
3. Why is it so critical for God's peacemakers to apply the Don't-Judge-Others Principle to their lives?

The Don't-Judge-Others Principle

Make it your practice not to judge the words, actions, or motives of other people.

7.2 The Seven-Times-Seven Principle

Read Matthew 18:21,22.

4. What false assumption are we making when we withhold forgiveness because someone continues to do things that hurt us?

5. “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” Why is it so good to hear these words coming from Jesus himself and not from an apostle or Moses or some other Bible figure sent from God?

The Seven-Times-Seven Principle

Be patient when others offend you; forgive them when they repeat the same offenses.

7.3 The Turn-the-Other-Cheek Principle

Read Matthew 5:39-44.

6. What makes this Bible principle so hard to apply?
7. Is this a strategy for showing someone that you love him or her or a strategy for winning a battle?
8. What risks are connected to this Bible principle?

The Turn-the-Other-Cheek Principle

Do not retaliate against those who sin against you, but instead respond with humility, kindness, and generosity. And, in love for those people, pray for them.

7.4 Fighting the Good Fight

Read Ephesians 6:12-17.

9. Define the spiritual resources for going to war in the church militant, and explain how you plan to use them in your daily battles of faith.

Read Matthew 28:20b.

10. How does this promise affect your daily approach to being at war with the real enemy?

Read Philippians 1:3-6.

11. Of what additional resource does this text remind us?

Closing Prayer

Create a prayer chain in which each member of the class adds one new thought from Lesson Seven.

Lesson Eight

A City of Peace

Worship

Leader: The wolf will live with the lamb,

Group: The leopard will lie down with the young goat,

L: The calf and the young lion and the yearling together;

G: And a little child shall lead them.

L: In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner to rally the people;

G: And his place of rest will be glorious.

Based on Isaiah chapter 11

8.1 Jesus Prays for Unity

Read John 17:11-23.

1. Underline portions of the text that you find striking. Note your reactions to those words you have underlined. How do the words you have underscored shape your understanding of conflict resolution, peacemaking, and your “co-mission” with the Savior?
2. True or False: A peacemaker’s work is also *Great-Commission evangelism work*.

8.2 Two Godless Models and a Lowly Samaritan

Read Luke 10:25-37.

3. What significance can we attach to the fact that Jesus used a (despised) Samaritan as an example of compassion in his parable?
4. What powerful implications does Jesus’ lesson of the good Samaritan have for all of us?

8.3 An Evangelism Strategy

Read Luke 10:5.

5. What connection between peacemaking and evangelism is captured in this simple directive?

6. Make a list of ways that your congregation could apply this simple concept in developing an approach to evangelism.

8.4 The Last Word

Read Colossians 3:12-17.

7. What qualities does the apostle Paul wish would become as much a part of us as our own clothing?

8. Paul urges us to be thankful and to display an attitude of gratitude in our hearts. Explain why we need to be grateful to God before we can become effective as one of his peacemakers.

9. Why is this a good text to consider as the last word in a course about conflict?

Closing Prayer

Write a prayer that summarizes the most important points from this course.