

# Conflict Resolution

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## Introduction

Everyone experiences conflict from time to time—at home, on the job, in church, at school, and while traveling. Sometimes it is expressed in loud, angry arguments, sometimes in quiet resentment. In this study you will read Bible-based guidelines for handling conflict. They are collected from two books I have written: *Victory Over Grumpiness, Irritation and Anger* and *Talking with Respect and Love*. You can find these books at <http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/christianbibleadvicebooks.php>.

### 1. Pray alone before talking: Ask God if you should bring up a problem.

How can you know when to talk and when to be quiet? Although some people feel free to bring up everything on their mind, the Bible says at times it's best to remain silent.

*Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs. (Proverbs 10:12)*

*A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult. (Proverbs 12:16)*

On the other hand, *some topics ought to be discussed*—even if they produce tension. In fact, there are times when a rebuke or exhortation is in order. If you talk as a friend, you can discuss painful things.

*Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. (Proverbs 27:5-6)*

*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)*

Sometimes it is hard to know which principle to follow, whether to bring something up or to remain silent. The following questions will help you decide.

- What are my motives?
- Is this really my problem? What is my part in it? Did I help set it up?
- Have I been loving and respectful?
- How important is this topic?
- How important is this issue to God?
- Have I been a nag?
- Should I give grace a chance?

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*Make it personal* \_\_\_\_\_ 

How can you use the above information to help you better handle conflict?

## 2. Pray for the right attitude before you talk.

- Pray for a spirit of love, forgiveness and humility.
- Pray for help to speak politely and respectfully.

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

*Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips. (Psalm 141:3)*

- Pray to understand that conflicts are normal. Expect problems. Everyone (including you) is imperfect.
- Ask for wisdom to see your part in the problem. Read Matthew 7:3-5.

*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:3-5)*

Notice that Jesus gave us three steps:

- First, you must take the plank out of your own eye.
  - Once you take the plank out of your own eye you can see clearly. (It's impossible to see clearly while the plank still is in your eye.)
  - Once you confront your own sins, you can remove the speck from the other person's eye.
- Pray for a servant's heart. Make it a goal to minister to the other person as you talk.
  - Pray to have an eternal perspective.

*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)*

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### 3. Start the conversation wisely.

Put much thought and care into how you begin your conversation so you can set a positive tone for all that follows. Do not blurt out the first words that come to your mind.

*Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.  
(Proverbs 29:20)*

Introduce your subject in a way that makes it as easy as possible for the other person to respond well. Bring up things as a friend speaking to a friend, not as a warrior confronting an enemy. As the Bible says, *“pleasant words promote instruction”* (Proverbs 16:21).

- **Choose a good time to talk.**
- **Meet privately.**
- **If appropriate, pray together to have a good talk.**
- **Try one of these ways to start the conversation.**
  - Start with a compliment.  
The apostle Paul frequently used this technique in his letters. For example, although he had many critical things to write to the Corinthians, he began his first letter with compliments and words of encouragement (1 Corinthians 1:1-9).
  - Directly, but gently, introduce the topic.  
Don't hint about what is bothering you. Be direct, but friendly. For example, you could say, “I am feeling tense about something and I really want to work it out. Could we talk?”
  - Express your feelings instead of attacking. For example, you could say, “I felt really hurt when you interrupted me,” instead of, “You are such a jerk.”
  - Admit, “I could be wrong.”
  - Ask if you have caused offense.
  - Confess that *you* have a bad attitude, and ask for prayer.
  - Confront serious sin more strongly if appropriate. However, even then you often can be more effective if you are gentle.

*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)*

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#### 4. Speak and listen courteously and respectfully.

Determine that you, personally, will talk in a loving, godly manner regardless of how the other person talks. The way you talk usually is more important than whether you are right or wrong, whether your spouse listens to you, or whether you get your way. In other words, the process usually is more important than the result.

Speak courteously as a friend, not as an enemy. Demonstrate love, patience, and wisdom, regardless of how your spouse talks. As Paul wrote, *“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”* (1 Corinthians 8:1).

*Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. (Proverbs 16:24)*

*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:35)*

As you read the following guidelines, ask yourself how well you do in each area. Rate yourself from 0 to 10 on each topic.

- “0” means, “I really need to work on this.”
- “10” means, “I do very well at this.”
- **Listen intently. Try to see through others’ eyes. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Speak courteously. Never filthy language. (Read James 3:10.) My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Share feelings and opinions without attacking. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Make your point fairly quickly. Avoid long speeches. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Seek to minister to the other person. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Brainstorm possible resolutions. You may come up with something neither of you thought about. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Seek mutual resolutions (“win/win”), not personal victories. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Ask, “What would Jesus want me to say?” Or, “How would Jesus want me to talk?” My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Speak honestly. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Realize that people remember things differently. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Clarify your message. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Stick to the subject at hand. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Avoid provocative words. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_
  - “Always” and “never”
  - “If you loved me ...”
  - “Maybe we should get a divorce.”
  - “You’re just like your father (or mother).”
- **Control your anger. My score (0-10):** \_\_\_\_\_

*Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city. (Proverbs 16:32)*

*He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction. (Proverbs 17:19)*

*It is to a man’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel. (Proverbs 20:3)*

- Confess your sin (anger) and ask the person you are angry with to pray with you about your anger.
  - Call “time-out” if either of you talk in anger. There are three types of time-out. Choose the one that is most appropriate given the situation.
    - Time-out to get away from the conversation until you are ready to talk respectfully
    - Time-out to pray
    - Time-out to analyze what is going on
  - Do not engage in any form of physical violence.
  - **Be ready to say, “I’m sorry. Please forgive me.” My score (0-10): \_\_\_\_\_**
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How can you use the above information to help you better handle conflict?

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#### 5. End the conversation well.

There is no single pattern for how your discussion should conclude. However, the following guidelines will help you end your talks courteously and peacefully.

As you read the following guidelines, ask yourself how well you do in each area. Rate yourself from 0 to 10 on each topic.

- “0” means, “I really need to work on this.”
  - “10” means, “I do very well at this.”
  - **Be gracious. Be willing to agree to disagree. My score (0-10): \_\_\_\_\_**
  - **Be prepared for ongoing talks if necessary. My score (0-10): \_\_\_\_\_**
  - **If someone in an authority position makes a final decision, agree to follow it. My score (0-10): \_\_\_\_\_**
  - **Pray together if the other person is willing. My score (0-10): \_\_\_\_\_**
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What is one point in this section (“End the conversation well”) that will help you handle conflict?