

# Resolving Conflicts in Families

By Moe & Paige Becnel

We were recently asked, "How do you resolve conflicts?" Our immediate response was "That's a good question --- and we'll have to get back to you on that!"

Everyone experiences conflicts at different times in their life. You may have had conflicts at your job, with creditors, with businesses, and even with people at church. Yet, the most devastating conflicts are found in families. Conflicts directly oppose the real purpose of a family. As long as a conflict is not properly resolved, the family and all family members suffer.

## Understanding Conflicts

In researching the answer to the question, we found these Webster definitions ---

*Conflict:* > a fighting or struggle for mastery; > a combat  
> a striving to oppose or overcome

*Resolve:* > to do away with doubts or disputes; > to clear of difficulties

*Resolution:* > a fixed purpose or determination of mind  
> the act of unraveling a perplexing question or problem.

Thus, conflicts involve a struggle created by opposing views, opinions or purposes. Your conflicts are driven by what you want, what others want that you are not willing to give, what you can get, and wanting things your way.

### *Business Conflict:*

An example of a business conflict is when we go buy a car. The buyer's purpose is to get the best value for his money. The seller's purpose is to sell the car to the buyer at a price as close to the suggested retail price as possible. As such, buyer and seller often have conflicting goals!

Another example is conflict between employer and employee. There are management books that teach supervisors how to deal with employee conflicts. However, most teach conflict resolution as a learned process or formula that include negotiation skills, skills involving manipulation or even threats of disciplinary action. A Union contract negotiation is another example. The objective is to get at least part of what each side wants.

Enough about businesses --- in this article, we want to focus on key Biblical ingredients needed to successfully resolve conflict within ourselves and in families.

### *Personal Conflict:*

Everyday, we face a struggle between what our flesh wants vs. what God's Spirit desires for our lives. The struggle between flesh and Spirit is described in the Holy Bible as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life.

### *Relationship Conflict:*

James 4: 1-3 says, *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within 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. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”*

One of the toughest situations is when two people you love are in conflict with each other, and you are in the middle. Children of divorce know all about this situation, as divorced parents are often in conflict with each other. Extended family can create similar situations. According to the definition, resolution requires being of one mind and purpose with the other person. *We believe that true conflict resolution is not an art. It is also not a learned skill. Rather, it is an attitude of the heart!*

### **Key ingredients to successful conflict resolution:**

#### **1. Relationships are of utmost value!**

God is all about life-long relationships. All 10 Commandments to Israel from God dealt with relationships. The 1<sup>st</sup> four discuss our relationship with God. The other 6 discuss our relationships with people. All other issues are secondary to God.

As Christians, we are to pursue the heart of God and place great value on relationships. King David was commended as being “a man after God’s own heart.”

You can be, also.

Relationship is always more important than any issue being discussed. Do not determine to win a conflict at the expense of damaging fellowship with that person.

#### **2. Change your perspective!**

Value the other person, their feelings, their situation and their ideas. Be open to accepting the other person’s situations or ideas!

When the adulteress was brought to Jesus, and Jesus was expected to condemn her, Jesus resolved a conflict between the woman needing forgiveness and her accusers. He successfully resolved the conflict by changing her accusers’ perspective. He made them realize that they also had faults in their lives.

Anyway, your opinion or solution is not always the best, or the only good solution. That is known as “opinion idolatry”, and it has no place in successful families and relationships.

#### **3. Uphold Respect for the other person.**

A key to successful conflict resolution is that both parties maintain respect for each other. During conflict, often strife intensifies as we lose respect for the other person, and our hearts get harder toward each other. Never let a conflict damage the respect you have for the other person.

#### **4. Never discuss a conflict when emotions are high.**

Calm down first. Remember that communication is 25% words and 75% tone of voice --- what is really heard is not so much what you say, but how you say it.

James 1: 19 says, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

#### **5. Prayer is a necessary ingredient.**

Retreat from attacking and blaming your spouse, and advance in prayer and in using God’s Word against the devil.

As you pray over the conflict, you will start to see the conflict in a different light. Pastor Dino Rizzo (Sr. Pastor at Healing Place Church, Baton Rouge, LA) says, “My whole world looks totally different when I am on my knees in prayer. Prayer gives me a

different perspective.” Those things that seem so important to us in the natural look very different when we spend time in the presence of God.

Pray! Pray together and for each other. Pray before you discuss the issue. Pray - asking God to show you a reasonable compromise for each issue.

If you disagree with a decision your spouse has made, do not get angry, show disrespect or put them down. We all make mistakes. Love them anyway. Do not let the decision drive a wedge between you and your spouse.

6. ***Agreeing to disagree!***

There are times when, after extended discussions on an issue, no adequate resolution is found. At that point, we just need to “agree to disagree”, and let it go. Let go, for the sake of your relationship.

**Acts of Resolving Conflicts:**

1. ***Initiate a meeting to discuss the conflict.***

The conflict will not resolve itself. Matthew 18: 15 reads, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.” If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”

2. ***Involve a mediator, if necessary.***

Often, a 3<sup>rd</sup> party who is not involved in the situation can see the conflict in a different light, and propose a reasonable solution.

3. ***Give to the one who asks you --- Do not resist!***

Matthew 5: 39-42 “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. *Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*”

Please understand that Jesus is not interested in having disciples who are weak and afraid. He is interested in His disciples valuing people and expressing love.

Philippians 2: 3-4 says, “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*”

Giving will maintain and enhance relationships!

4. ***Regain respect!***

Have you already lost respect for your spouse or stepchild? Pray through! Ask God to re-establish respect in your heart. Make a list of the good qualities your spouse or stepchild has.

5. ***Admit when you are wrong!***

6. ***Apology is mandatory --- saying you are sorry when you have acted poorly!***

7. ***Forgive --- for any harsh words spoken or offensive action!***

8. ***Affirm your love --- for your spouse, children & family!***

9. ***Pray --- to get God’s perspective on the conflict!***

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