

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND BIBLICAL PEACEMAKING



Presented by
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CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict within a congregation is inevitable and we often have trouble knowing what to do about it. Conflict might range from disagreements about curriculum to small factious groups at odds with each other over decisions made at the board level. Whatever the case – conflicts will come. A healthy leadership team is not afraid to talk about their awareness of conflict and its resolution, address their current preparedness for managing conflict and engage the congregation in healthy conflict management principles. This training combines the current resources available within a biblical foundation for peacemaking in the church.

One explanation for our trouble in handling conflict is that the prevailing **conflict culture** of the church is often negative or considered sinful. In other words, it is believed by many that the church should not have conflict because the church is based on love, acceptance and forgiveness. This negative culture restricts conflict from fulfilling its redemptive usefulness in our communities of faith (James 1:3).

Where did this negative culture come from? To a large extent many Christians believe that conflict is a result of the fall. However, conflict existed before the sin entered the world (the serpent presented Eve with a conflict of values in Gen 3:1) and even before the creation of the world (in Lucifer's fall). It is possible that in God's sovereign design 'conflict' is more neutral than negative? I believe it is. By placing conflict in the neutral zone it might sway us to look more closely at how we behave in conflict instead of ignoring conflict in our congregations.

Another reason why we have trouble with conflict in the church might be the repetitive unhealthy **conflict responses** of church members and their leaders. It is not uncommon for church members or leaders to avoid conflict until it is too late. The prevailing conflict management style used by Christians is passive or evasive (see Jim Van Yperen, [Making Peace](#)). Somehow we think the problem will go away over time. This usually happens when the "difficult person" (or pastor) leaves the church.

When we finally do get around to handling conflict it often results in removing someone from the church. Others might choose to leave one congregation for another down the road only to find that the same problem exist in the new congregation. It followed them because it was them. The opposite response to avoidance is also prevalent in the church: defensiveness and/or aggression. Some people seem to have a propensity to become antagonistic during intense conflict situations. Even the kindest people can turn into monsters when involved in a church conflict. These unhealthy and often sinful behaviors do not create an atmosphere for redemptive conflict management.

Tools and Resources

A third reason that might explain why we have trouble responding redemptively to conflict is a lack of **conflict coaching** (or training). The church is charged with the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18) yet how many church members or leaders could define redemptive steps towards reconciling during conflict. It is not motivation that prevents us from approaching the subject. Most Christians grieve the pain of being at odds with another brother or sister in Christ. It is the fact that we often do not know what to do in a given conflict situation that gives us the most trouble.

The highest responses to a surveys conducted by the Clergy Care Network indicates that conflict management is a perceived and urgent need amongst church leaders. Whether it is the lack of available training courses at the seminary level or the increase of the complexity of conflict in our culture, Christian leaders want more training in this vital area of ministry. Thankfully, there is a new trend within the evangelical circles to resource material like Ken Sande (The Peacemaker), Jim Van Yperen (Making Peace), Hugh F. Halverstadt (Managing Church Conflict) and Deeper Waters Conflict Coaching (Alan Simpson, that's me).

On a final note, how we view conflict with people, or “the others”, will make a difference in how we approach the conflict. Assessing and changing our thinking about conflict is the key to transforming our behaviours into more redemptive responses in the midst of conflict. Here are four ways to look at conflict with difficult people that might encourage redemptive behaviour.

1. **Look inside you:** Have an honest look at what you may have contributed to the conflict and take ownership of that contribution. What is it about me that makes this issue a conflict with this difficult person?
2. **Look at them:** Work hard at listening to understand the other persons view before trying to prove yours. Am I afraid of being convinced that I am wrong?
3. **Look at issues:** Focus on issues rather than people. What is really at stake here in this conflict: reputation, integrity, nursery space, or just plain pride?
4. **Look to God:** What is God teaching you about you in this situation? What does the scripture say about how I should think and behave in this situation?

This conflict resolution workshop is only an introduction to the material that Deeper Waters uses and presents in seminars across the nation. The purpose of this two hour workshop is to help church board members accept that conflict in congregational life is inevitable, natural and can provide an opportunity for personal and corporate growth. This workshop will provide an opportunity for church transitional leaders to increase their awareness and preparedness around the topic of conflict enabling them to engage in healthy conflict management. The material and resources are offered here with the goal of encouraging leaders to address conflict in a healthy and biblically based manner.

Conflict Readiness Evaluation

This brief evaluation is designed to help you determine how well your church is prepared to deal with conflict.

1. Church members understand and know how to apply biblical peacemaking principles so that they can resolve most of their own conflicts personally and privately. In particular, they know when and how to: make an effective confession, overlook an offense, confront others constructively, involve church leaders in a dispute, forgive as God forgives, negotiate in a biblical manner, and deal with people who refuse to be reasonable; they also know when it is appropriate for a Christian to file a lawsuit.

Not Prepared 0 1 2 3 4 5 Fully Prepared

2. Leaders are trained to resolve conflict in a biblical manner, that is, they know when to intervene in conflicts within the congregation and how to apply biblical principles of negotiation, conflict counseling, mediation, and arbitration.

Not Prepared 0 1 2 3 4 5 Fully Prepared

3. Leaders are trained and willing to exercise church discipline in a loving, constructive, consistent, and redemptive manner, and they understand what steps to take to avoid being sued by disgruntled members.

Not Prepared 0 1 2 3 4 5 Fully Prepared

4. Leaders understand the common legal actions that are filed against churches today and follow established legal practices needed to protect the church from legal liability. Specifically, the church is incorporated, insured, uses conciliation clauses in contracts, gets all important agreements in writing, uses professionals before conflicts arise, and follows all of its policies and procedures consistently.

Not Prepared 0 1 2 3 4 5 Fully Prepared

5. The church has adopted special policies needed to prevent unnecessary conflict and reduce exposure to legal liability. These policies cover: the control of church property; confidentiality and access to church records; biblical counseling; conflict resolution; screening youth workers; reporting actual or suspected child abuse; selecting, supervising, and discharging employees and volunteers.

Not Prepared 0 1 2 3 4 5 Fully Prepared

6. Members have been fully and specifically informed about the church's policies and bylaws and have expressly consented to be bound by them.

Not Prepared 0 1 2 3 4 5 Fully Prepared

Adapted from Managing Conflict in Your Church

Total Score: _____ out of 30

Ten Steps to Problem Solving

1. Set a specific time for talking about the problem and agree on guidelines for talking/listening
2. Define and redefine the problem in your own words
3. Agree together on the definition of the problem
4. Talk about your contribution and other factors to the problem
5. Talk about what has not worked in the past to resolve the problem
6. Brainstorm about possible solution to the problem
7. Evaluation each possible solution
8. Agree on one solution to commit to doing together
9. Encourage each other as you see commitment to solution
10. Set another time for evaluating progress

Facilitated Mediation Conversation Format

1. Welcome, scripture and prayer
2. State the purpose of the meeting
3. State your role as a mediation facilitator
4. Set out time frame and time outs
5. Set and agree upon guidelines for talking and listening
6. Set out an agree upon a format for talking and listening
7. Allow sufficient time for talking and listening
8. Find places of agreement to build trust and design next steps
9. Ask each party what has been accomplished today and what still needs work
10. Agree and the next steps and close in prayer

Congregational Meeting Format

1. Welcome, scripture and prayer
2. State the purpose of the meeting
3. Set and agree upon guidelines for talking and listening
4. Set out an agree upon a format for talking and listening
5. Allow sufficient time for talking and listening
6. Find places of agreement to build trust and design next steps
7. Agree and the next steps and close in prayer

Guidelines for Listening and Responding

1. Listen respectfully

- a. We agree to listen respectfully and attentively seek to understand the other person's needs, interests and perspective
- b. We agree to take turns speaking and not interrupt each other
- c. We agree to make a conscious, sincere effort to refrain from unproductive arguing, venting, or prolonged narration
- d. We will ask questions of each other for the purpose of gaining clarity and understanding
- e. We agree not to blame, attack or engage in put-downs or labeling
- f. Where possible, we agree to call each other by first names, not 'he' or 'she'

2. Speak from your own perspective

- a. We will use "I" statements, such as "I think," "I feel," "I believe" etc. and refrain from "You" or "we/they/them/us" statements
- b. We recognize that, even if we do not agree with it, each of us is entitled to our own perspective - "self truth"
- c. We will acknowledge our own anger/joy without venting on others
- d. We can use the format of healthy communication
 - i. What I observed.....when this happened . . .
 - ii. How I feel.....I felt, feel, ...
 - iii. What I need or value.....because I need/value . . .
 - iv. The concrete request.....would you be willing to . . .?

3. Confidentiality and respect

- a. We agree not to speak about persons not present unless we are clarifying facts of the past (but not motivations or judgments)
- b. We agree that people can speak for themselves after this meeting, but they will not presume to speak for or about others

The Ten Most Predictable Times of Church Conflict

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Easter – increased activity, people and interaction | 6. Changes in the Pastor's Family |
| 2. Stewardship Campaigns/Budget Time | 7. Introduction of Next Generation into the Church |
| 3. Addition of New Staff – letting go of Staff | 8. The Completion of a New Building |
| 4. Change in Leadership Style – Decision Making Processes | 9. Loss of Church Membership |
| 5. The Pastor's Vacation | 10. Increase in Church Membership |

Conflict Intensity Scale

Conflict Intensity Scale			
Code*	Level	Description	Appropriate Response
0	Minor offenses	Characterized by disappointed expectations or incidental irritations	Overlooking
1.0 - 1.9	Low-grade conflict	Characterized by uneasiness; discomfort; something "feels wrong;" goal is to put finger on the problem	Discussion
2.0 - 2.9	Problem to be solved	Characterized by acknowledging an issue needs resolution; focus on the problem, the role; goal is to solve, collaborate	Discussion/negotiation
3.0 - 3.9	Debate	Characterized by muddying personalities with the problem; emotions begin to get the way; intermittent anger and demeaning humor; goal is to persuade	Discussion/negotiation or Mediation
4.0 - 4.9	Win/lose competition	The contest begins! Characterized by solidified positions, lines being drawn, factions being formed; goal is to win, at the expense of others if necessary	Mediation or Arbitration
5.0 - 5.9	Fight/flight	Characterized by open hostility; material issues are forgotten and persons become issue; opponent viewed as the "enemy;" goal is to inflict harm and dissolve relationship	Arbitration or Church discipline
6.0 - 6.9	Search and destroy	Characterized by total breakdown of communication; identifying opponents as emotions become steely cold; goal is to inflict substantial harm and remove all opposition	Church discipline or Litigation
7.0 - 7.9	Annihilation "Code Red"	Characterized by the need to wipe out other people; goal is to obliterate those seen as being responsible for problem; can lead to suicide (self destruction), murder, or war	Church discipline, Litigation, or Self-defense (flight or war)
*Code: Each new level represents a ten-fold increase in the intensity of the conflict			
Adapted from Sam Leonard, Solutions, Inc., 1515 E. 9th Avenue, Suite 112, Denver, CO 80218			

Conflict Analysis Grid

Conflict Analysis Grid	
Parties:	
Type(s) of conflict	
Intensity level	
Source(s) of conflict	
Harmful attitudes and behaviors	
Response being used & its effect	
Best response to use & why	

Adapted from Managing Conflict in Your Church

Factors Affecting Conflict – a diagnostic tool for conflict management

1. Individuals involved – Who is involved in the conflict?

(personalities, style, self-image, values, beliefs, attitudes, needs, interests, skill, ability, personal history)

2. Relationship – What is the relationship between the parties?

(nature and importance of the relationship, history, patterns or habits, roles, assessment of each other's motivation, level of interdependence, degree of negativity towards each other, expectations, degree of understanding and trust)

3. Approach – How are they approaching the conflict?

(style, attitude, manner, use of power, conflict orientation)

4. Nature of conflict – What is the nature of the conflict?

(size, scope, importance, complexity, number and awareness of issues, degree of differences, complexity of motivations, number of people involved, perceived consequences, history or related issues surrounding the conflict)

5. Context – What is the context of the conflict?

(setting, social conditions, culture, roles, systems within which the conflict occurs)

6. Power – Who has the balance of power in the conflict?

(perception of resources that one has or controls, information, support, role or social status, self-image)

7. Action taken - What have you done so far to resolve the conflict?

8. Action needed - What has to happen next?

13 steps in dealing with difficult people

1. Use self talk to calm and control you
2. Catch your thinking – seek to understand the other person first
3. Check your energy level – match intensity with the other when necessary
4. Show self respect – be confident in your communication
5. Be consistent in your verbal and non-verbal behaviour
6. Listen to the way the other wants you to hear them
7. Hold your tongue – no rabbit trails, don't let your stories get in the way
8. Reflect or rephrase back – ask clarifying questions
9. Be present with the person – do they know you are listening – eye contact
10. Watch your “but” – the verbal eraser of what has just been said
11. Share your feelings and thoughts by using I statements
12. Return to persons feelings – find agreement with what you can see
13. Discuss next step – ask them what they would like to happen now

Be a facilitator of group processes for your church

1. Agree on guidelines for listening and talking
2. Gather expectations from the group
3. Empower others to take responsibility
4. Be a third party, lead by listening
5. Ask questions instead of giving answers
6. Gather questions or topics before answering
7. Be transparent and authentic with people

Create pathways for people in difficult conversations

1. Interview individual parties before meeting
2. Check readiness to engage in peacemaking
3. Discover expectations for meeting
4. Listen empathically without judgement
5. Reflect back what you have heard
6. Ask how the person wants you to be with them
7. Clearly define your role, process and timeframe
8. Follow through on agreements

Recommended Organizations

Clergy Care Network is a ministry of Focus on the Family Canada and sponsoring denominations across Canada. We offer a toll-free help line for all clergy and their immediate family members, as well as a website, e-newsletter, and seminars. We have a list of approved Christian counsellors and mediators who specialize in working with clergy families and with conflict resolution. www.clergycare.ca



Deeper Waters Conflict Coaching is a ministry that provides coaching and training for people who want to transform relational and organizational conflict into positive change. Deeper Waters can assess the conflict, develop strategies, and facilitate processes for effective management of relational and organizational conflict in a collaborative and productive manner.

www.outreach.ca

Fairhaven Ministries Canada is a non-denominational, registered, charitable society committed to providing a retreat ministry where Christian leaders can be encouraged, supported, and restored physically, emotionally, and spiritually. www.fairhavenministries.org

Metanoia Ministry specializes in conflict reconciliation, leadership formation and intentional interim pastorates for evangelical churches. (Focus: pastoral, theological, leadership, community). www.restoringthechurch.org



Outreach Canada is a Christian ministry organization specializing in church research, growth, planting and transitional ministry resources. They strive to be the best single source for resources and information on the church in Canada. www.outreach.ca

Oasis Ministries is a small group 5-day retreat sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ, Canada. Designed for those in church or missions ministry, it is here that the special spiritual, psychological, mental, physical and leadership needs of those in professional Christian ministry are understood and addressed. www.crusade.org/oasis

Peacemaker Ministries is committed to equipping Christians and their churches to respond to conflict biblically. (Focus: behaviour, legal, biblical, process) www.hispeace.org

Shawchuck & Associates, Ltd. provides management consultation and training services to Christian institutions and organizations. www.shawchuck.com

Recommended Books

- Bell, R. D. (2001). Biblical Models of Handling Conflict. Burlington: Welch Publishing.
- Boers, A. (1999). Never call them Jerks. Alban Institute.
- Cloud, H. and Townsend, J (2003) Boundaries Face to Face. Grand Rapids: Zondervan
- Cosgrave, C.H. & Hatfield, D.D. (1994). Church Conflicts: The Hidden System Behind the Fights. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Frangipane, F. (2002). Its Time to End Church Splits. Cedar Rapids: Arrow Publications.
- Gilmore, J. (2002). Pastoral Politics: Why Ministers Resign. AGM Publishers.
- Greenfield, G. (2001). The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Attacks. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- Haugk, K. (1998). Antagonist in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Difficult Conflict. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House.
- Halverstadt, H.. F. (1991). Managing Church Conflict. Kentucky: Westminster/Knox Press.**
- Leas, S. B. (2002). Moving Your Church through Conflict. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute.
- Leas, S. B. (1982). Leadership and Conflict. In Schaller, L. (Ed.) Creative Leadership Series. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Marshall, M. (1990). Beyond Termination: A Spouse's Story. Nashville: Broadman Press.
- Mains, D. (1997). Healing the Dysfunctional Church. Illinois: Victor Books.
- Newberger, K. C. (2001). Theological Foundations For Resolving Church Conflict. Retrieved December 2,2002, from: <http://mediate.com/articles/newberger.cfm>
- Parrott, L. (1996) High Maintenance Relationships. Wheaton: Tyndale House Pub.
- Rediger, G. (1997). Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack. Louisville: Westminster John Know Press.
- Sande, K. (1998, 3rd ed.). The Peacemaker. North Dartmouth, MA: Baker Books.**
- Schrock-Shenk, Ressler (1999), Making Peace with Conflict, Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa**
- Shelly, M. (1995).Well-Intentioned Dragns: Ministering to Problem People in the Church. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers.
- Shelley, M. (1997). Leading Your Church Through Conflict and Reconciliation: Thirty Strategies to Transform Your Ministry. Library of Leadership Development. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers.
- Van Yperen, J. (2002). Making Peace: A guide to Overcoming Church Conflict. Moody Press.**

Self awareness tools

1. Thomas/Kilmann, <http://www.kilmann.com/conflict.html>
2. Kraybill, http://www.riverhousepress.com/Conflict_Style_Inventory.htm
3. Speed Lees, <http://www.alban.org/bookdetails.aspx?id=578>
4. Van Yperen, <http://restoringthechurch.org/resources/kits/index.html>