

Influence
MAGAZINE

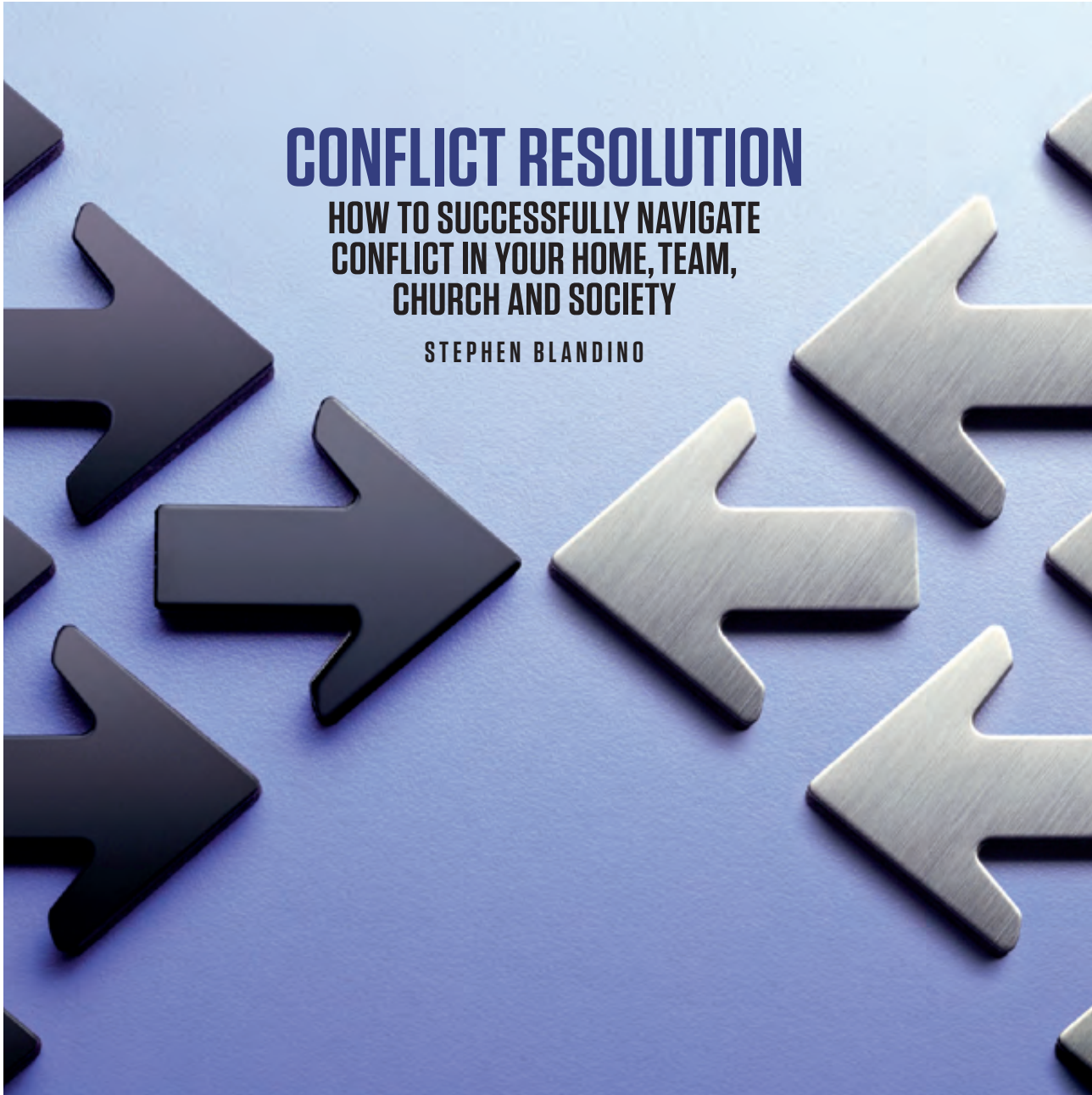
MAKE IT COUNT

An eight-week study
for leadership teams

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE
CONFLICT IN YOUR HOME, TEAM,
CHURCH AND SOCIETY

STEPHEN BLANDINO



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

Three Types of Conflict

Assess: What kinds of conflict do you think leaders deal with the most?

Insights and Ideas

No matter how much of a peacemaker you are, we all experience conflict in some shape, form or fashion.

James 4:1–6 describes the various forms of conflict like this: “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.’”

James introduces us to three kinds of conflict:

1. *External conflict.* James begins his instructions on conflict with a question: “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” James is referring to relational conflict among followers of Christ. Regardless of the situation, the biggest issue in any conflict is the health of the individuals involved in the conflict. Healthy people know how to successfully navigate conflict, but unhealthy people produce and perpetuate conflict.
2. *Internal conflict.* James does more than simply identify conflicts in the church. He addresses the root of the problem when he answers his own question with another question: “Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” The desires James refers to are sensual desires born of selfish wants. James shows a progression — an escalation — in conflict and makes a connection between *wants* and *wars*. James talks about the desire for something that seems out of reach. That’s the *internal want*. Then he talks about lashing out with arguments and violence. That’s the *external war*. The point is clear: Our unfulfilled internal wants produce our uncontrolled external wars.
3. *Upward conflict.* Upward conflict is the tension we have with God. What causes this conflict? Verses 2–6 provide three clues: impure motives, adulterous relationships and pride. In other words, we experience conflict with God when we pray with impure motives, exercise spiritual infidelity, and walk in a spirit of pride.

Here’s the big idea of James’ words: Upward peace creates inward peace that produces outward peace.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How does James 4:1–6 speak to you as a leader (at home and at work)?
2. Which form of conflict — external, internal or upward — do you think leaders struggle with most? Why?
3. What form of conflict are you challenged to address in your own life or ministry?

Apply

Spend some time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to reveal any kind of conflict you need to resolve, whether external, internal or upward. Whatever you sense God saying, walk in obedience to His leadership.

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

Three Types of Conflict

Assess: What kinds of conflict do you think leaders deal with the most?

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble’” (James 4:1–6).

Three Types of Conflict:

1. _____ *conflict*. James begins his instructions on conflict with a question: “What causes fights and quarrels among you?”
2. _____ *conflict*. “Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” Our unfulfilled internal wants produce our uncontrolled external wars.
3. _____ *conflict*. Upward conflict is the tension we have with God. What causes this conflict? Verses 2–6 provide three clues: impure motives, adulterous relationships and pride.

Apply

Spend some time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to reveal any kind of conflict you need to resolve, whether external, internal or upward. Whatever you sense God saying, walk in obedience to His leadership.

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society**Developing the Posture to Successfully Navigate Conflict**

Team Review: How did you respond to the Lord's leading regarding any unresolved external, internal or upward conflict?

Assess: What attitudes are necessary to successfully navigate conflict?

Insights and Ideas

Every person on earth — rich or poor, wise or foolish, young or old — will experience conflict. Nobody is immune from conflict. So, what separates those who successfully navigate conflict from those who find it continually hindering and undermining them? I believe it comes down to posture. In other words, the attitude and spirit in which you approach conflict have the greatest impact on your ability to manage conflict in a healthy manner.

Some people go into conflict with a fix-it mindset. They've already decided what to do, and they're determined to fix the situation or the other person. Others avoid conflict altogether, trying to ignore it or wish it away. Still others enter conflict with a commitment to manage it successfully. These individuals typically exhibit three qualities:

1. *Humility*. Ephesians 4:2 says, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." When you approach conflict out of a spirit of humility, it immediately disarms much of the aggressiveness and agitation associated with the conflict. Furthermore, humility allows you to be teachable in the process. There is almost always something to learn from conflict. Unfortunately, most leaders want to do all the teaching. Proverbs 23:12 says, "Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge." Notice, teachability is not automatic. You have to "apply" your heart and ears before you can glean wisdom. That starts with humility.
2. *A willingness to listen*. One of Stephen Covey's habits of highly effective people is, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." This is only possible if we embrace a listening posture. Give the person your undivided attention. Not only will you understand what's really going on, but you'll likely garner greater respect from the other party. Most people simply want to feel heard. Unfortunately, leaders often keep this from happening because they leverage the force of their position or personality to make their point. As Proverbs 18:13 reminds us, "To answer before listening — that is folly and shame."
3. *Genuine kindness*. Finally, enter conflict with a posture of kindness. Too often we come into conflict with our words and attitudes loaded with poison and defensiveness. This never goes well, and usually creates more damage. Keep this simple truth in mind: Being a jerk is not a prerequisite for engaging conflict. Model kindness. Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Reflect and Discuss

1. How have you seen a person's attitude or posture impact his or her ability (positively or negatively) to navigate conflict?
2. Which of the three qualities above most stands out to you?
3. What other attitudes are essential to successfully navigate conflict?

Apply

Quickly think about a conflict you experienced recently. Which of the three ingredients above was in short supply (on your end)? What would you do differently if you were to face the conflict again today?

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society
Developing the Posture to Successfully Navigate Conflict

Assess: What attitudes are necessary to successfully navigate conflict?

Every person on earth — rich or poor, wise or foolish, young or old — will experience conflict. Nobody is immune from conflict. The attitude and spirit in which you approach conflict have the greatest impact on your ability to manage conflict in a healthy manner.

Three characteristics of people who successfully navigate conflict:

1. _____.

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2).

“Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge” (Proverbs 23:12).

2. *A willingness to* _____.

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” — Stephen Covey

“To answer before listening — that is folly and shame” (Proverbs 18:13).

3. *Genuine* _____.

Being a jerk is a not a prerequisite for engaging conflict. Model kindness.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Apply

Quickly think about a conflict you experienced recently. Which of the three ingredients above was in short supply (on your end)? What would you do differently if you were to face the conflict again today?

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

How to 'Do' Conflict

Team Review: After reflecting on a previous conflict, what would you have changed about your posture toward that conflict?

Assess: How do you typically handle conflict?

Insights and Ideas

A Acts 15 relates a conflict between Paul and Barnabas and a group of men from Judea. The issue had to do with whether Gentiles should be circumcised. From this conflict, we discover six practical steps to conflict resolution:

1. *Hear both sides of the story.* Paul and Barnabas reported how God had used them to make Gentile converts. And believers who were in the party of the Pharisees explained their view that Gentiles should be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses (Acts 15:2–5). The apostles and elders heard both sides of the story.
2. *Engage in discussion.* Next, the apostles and elders took time to discuss the matter. Acts 15:6–7 says, “The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion” Rather than jumping to a quick conclusion, these leaders took the time necessary to gain a full understanding of the conflict.
3. *Present the facts.* After much discussion, Peter addressed the crowd by drawing their attention to the work God was doing among the Gentiles and the fact that God had shown acceptance of the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:7–11).
4. *Provide supporting evidence.* Paul and Barnabas talked about the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. Then, James quoted the prophets to confirm the work of the Spirit among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12–18). This commentary provided additional evidence to help the leaders deal with the conflict wisely.
5. *Articulate a kind, responsible, and Spirit-led solution.* James said, “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (Acts 15:19–21). Notice, the solution was based on the facts — without being overbearing and without ignoring the Gentiles’ responsibilities. Verse 28 says, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements” The requirements were explained as directed by the Holy Spirit.
6. *Put together a communication strategy.* Finally, after articulating the solution, the apostles and elders put together a team to deliver a letter to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. The letter brought clarification to the entire situation and provided a solution.

What was the final result? Acts 15:31 says, “The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.” The Church successfully and responsibly resolved the conflict.

Read and Reflect

1. How do these six conflict resolution strategies challenge you?
2. Which of the six principles is easiest for you to forget? Why?
3. How might the use of these principles have produced a better result in a previous conflict you’ve faced?

Apply

Think about a conflict you are facing right now. Using the conflict resolution framework in Acts 15, how should you proceed and make room for resolution?

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society
How to ‘Do’ Conflict

Assess: How do you typically handle conflict?

Acts 15 relates a conflict between Paul and Barnabas and a group of men from Judea. The issue had to do with whether Gentiles should be circumcised.

Six practical steps to conflict resolution:

1. *Hear* _____ *sides of the story* (Acts 15:2-5).

2. *Engage in* _____.

“The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion ... ”
(Acts 15:6-7).

3. *Present the* _____ (Acts 15:7-11).

4. *Provide* _____ *evidence*.

Paul and Barnabas talked about the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. Then, James quoted the prophets to confirm the work of the Spirit among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12-18).

5. *Articulate a kind,* _____, *and Spirit-led* _____.

“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (Acts 15:19-21).

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements” (Acts 15:28).

6. *Put together a* _____ *strategy*.

“The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message” (Acts 15:31).

Apply

Think about a conflict you are facing right now. Using the conflict resolution framework in Acts 15, how should you proceed and make room for resolution?

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

What to Do When You Can't Resolve a Conflict

Team Review: How have the six steps from Acts 15 changed the way you approach conflict?

Assess: When was a time you faced a conflict you couldn't resolve?

Insights and Ideas

Unfortunately, we can't resolve every conflict in the way we might hope. In fact, some conflicts are never resolved. What do you do in those situations? How do you move forward when conflict is simmering in the background?

1. *Decipher between resolving and managing tension.* Author Andy Stanley notes the importance of assessing whether a conflict is a tension to be resolved or a tension to be managed. For example, if you have kids, you may be experiencing tension regarding how much freedom to give them. They, of course, expect more freedom. You, on the other hand, expect more responsibility in their behavior (which will earn them more freedom). You will never fully resolve this tension because it was meant to be managed, not resolved. The same is true in church. There may be tension about how much worship to do in your services. Some people think it's too much, while others insist it's too little. You'll never resolve this tension and make everyone happy. Instead, it's a tension you have to manage. When you can't resolve a conflict, ask yourself, *Is this a conflict that was meant to be resolved, or is this a tension that was meant to be managed?*
2. *Protect the relationship.* Sometimes a conflict will arise that jeopardizes a relationship. You might disagree with a family member's behavior, or you might be at odds with how a co-worker is handling a project. Even if the conflict escalates, always make the relationship your highest priority. Maintain open communication, and don't burn bridges. People are more important than our opinions and projects.
3. *Set clear boundaries.* Proverbs 25:17 says, "Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house — too much of you, and they will hate you." Notice, this verse doesn't say never to set foot in your neighbor's house. It simply sets a boundary. The same principle applies to conflict. When a conflict remains unresolved, it doesn't mean you should never talk to the person again. Rather, you may need to set some boundaries. This is especially true if the other person is disrespectful or even toxic.
4. *Pray.* Finally, if a conflict is unresolved, pray for yourself and the other person. Ask God to help you resolve the conflict. Protect your heart from bitterness. Pray for God to bless the other person. I've seen resolutions happen years later as people were faithful to pray, trust the Lord, and maintain an open heart.

Unresolved conflict is not easy to navigate, but the four steps above will help you reframe the conflict and your response to it.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What does unresolved conflict do in our hearts?
2. Which of the four strategies above most challenge you? Why?
3. What tips or ideas would you add to the list above?

Apply

What conflict have you faced that was never resolved? How do the four steps above reframe the conflict in your mind? Perhaps you need to initiate contact to bring about resolution. If so, what should be your first step?

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

What to Do When You Can't Resolve a Conflict

Assess: When was a time you faced a conflict you couldn't resolve?

Unfortunately, we can't resolve every conflict in the way we might hope. In fact, some conflicts are never resolved.

How to respond when conflicts aren't resolved:

1. *Decipher between* _____ *and* _____ *tension.*

Author Andy Stanley notes the importance of assessing whether a conflict is a tension to be resolved or a tension to be managed. When you can't resolve a conflict, ask yourself, *Is this a conflict that was meant to be resolved, or is this a tension that was meant to be managed?*

2. *Protect the* _____.

Even if the conflict escalates, always make the relationship your highest priority. Maintain open communication, and don't burn bridges. People are more important than our opinions and projects.

3. *Set clear* _____.

"Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house — too much of you, and they will hate you" (Proverbs 25:17).

4. _____.

Ask God to help you resolve the conflict. Protect your heart from bitterness. Pray for God to bless the other person.

Apply

What conflict have you faced that was never resolved? How do the four steps above reframe the conflict in your mind? Perhaps you need to initiate contact to bring about resolution. If so, what should be your first step?

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

How to Handle Conflict at Home

Team Review: What other thoughts have you had about unresolved conflict?

Assess: What are the biggest sources of conflict in homes today?

Insights and Ideas

R egardless of your role at home, conflict will inevitably arise. For some, these conflicts rest like a dark storm cloud, changing the atmosphere of the home. For others, these conflicts come and go quickly, never having time to grow deep roots of bitterness.

So, how do you handle conflict in a healthy way at home? Here are four keys:

1. **Trust.** Establishing trust begins with a love that's not based on emotion. Author Jimmy Evans observes that agape love — unconditional love — is the only love not based on emotion, and it must serve as the thermostat for your home. If the thermostat of your home is based on emotion, then the temperature of love in your home will go up and down. In this environment, trust evaporates because it has no solid foundation. But when you set the thermostat with agape love, trust has a firm footing.
2. **Truth.** Speaking truth in a family is essential. Lies will only undermine the trust you've worked hard to establish. In Ephesians 4:15, the apostle Paul said, "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ." Author Jimmy Evans says, "Truth without grace is mean. Grace without truth is meaningless." You need both to foster a healthy home. If you can't speak the truth in love, you will eventually resent the people you love.
3. **Tone.** Tone is all about *how* you tell the truth. Again, Paul said, "Instead, speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Simply put, we must speak the truth in the tone of love. Tone always dictates how a conversation will go, and the tone of *connection* will always outpace the tone of *correction*. What do the tone of connection and the tone of correction sound like? Proverbs 15:1 tells us: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." The tone of connection is gentle, while the tone of correction is harsh.
4. **Timing.** The last key to resolving conflict at home is timing. Our tendency is to deal with conflict when it's at one of two extremes: when it's easy to resolve or when it has turned into a full-blown crisis. When conflict is somewhere in the middle, we tend to ignore it. But ignoring conflict allows it to compound over time. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."

Reflect and Discuss

1. What kind of love was your family built on growing up? How did it affect trust in your home?
2. How have you found the four keys above to be true in your own family?
3. Which of the four keys is your greatest strength and your greatest weakness?

Apply

Prayerfully review the four keys to handling conflict at home. What are some practical steps you can take to cultivate trust, truth, tone and timing? Put together an action plan this week, and start fostering a healthier conflict resolution environment in your home.

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

How to Handle Conflict at Home

Assess: What are the biggest sources of conflict in homes today?

Regardless of your role at home, conflict will inevitably arise. For some, these conflicts rest like a dark storm cloud, changing the atmosphere of the home. For others, these conflicts come and go quickly, never having time to grow deep roots of bitterness.

Four keys to resolving conflict at home:

1. _____.

Author Jimmy Evans observes that agape love — unconditional love — is the only love not based on emotion, and it must serve as the thermostat for your home.

2. _____.

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

3. _____.

Tone always dictates how a conversation will go, and the tone of _____ will always outpace the tone of _____.

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

4. _____.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Apply

Prayerfully review the four keys to handling conflict at home. What are some practical steps you can take to cultivate trust, truth, tone and timing? Put together an action plan this week, and start fostering a healthier conflict resolution environment in your home.

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society**How to Handle Conflict With Your Team**

Team Review: How have you applied trust, truth, tone and timing to cultivate healthy conflict resolution at home?

Assess: What are the biggest conflicts we tend to experience as a team?

Insights and Ideas

Team conflict can be negative, demoralizing and demeaning. We've all seen conflict disrupt the unity of a team and stop progress in its tracks. So, how do you handle conflict with your team? Consider these four strategies:

1. *Cultivate healthy team conflict.* Author and consultant Patrick Lencioni is a big proponent of team conflict resolution and has written extensively on the subject. Lencioni asserts that when a team cannot disagree, debate ideas or have hard conversations, the organization fails to produce results. What's the key to creating healthy conflict with your team? Trust. When you really trust one another, people are much more willing to push back on ideas and engage in lively discussions because they don't fear retribution. The result is increased commitment and accountability for results.
2. *Establish conflict ground rules.* Culture is the result of whatever you tolerate. If you tolerate murmuring, complaining, backstabbing and conflict among team members, you'll produce a culture with silos, anger and even hostility. In his organization, financial expert Dave Ramsey says, "Complaints go up and praise goes around." In other words, if you have a complaint about a team member, go to that team member first. If that doesn't resolve it, go "up" to your supervisor (not your co-workers, friends, or anyone else who will listen). But if you have praise for your team members, share it and celebrate it. Identify your ground rules for conflict resolution, and then communicate them to your team.
3. *Deal with conflict quickly.* Conflict has a way of gathering listeners and growing legs. In other words, when a conflict arises, people tend to share it with anyone who will listen, and those people walk around sharing it with everyone else. Don't let conflict go unchecked. If you have an issue with a team member, address it now. If two of your team members are having issues with each other, pull them together and make them deal with it like grown adults. As the apostle Paul said, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26). The longer a conflict brews, the longer your mission will suffer.
4. *Invest in relationships.* Finally, if you want to minimize unnecessary team conflict, spend time investing in team relationships. Spend time together (outside of your team environment), eating, celebrating and praying together. The more "off time" a team spends together, the less conflict you'll experience.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How open (and trusting) is our team when it comes to engaging in healthy conflict?
2. What ground rules do we need to establish when conflict arises between fellow team members?
3. How can we better invest in relationships among our team members?

Apply

Take two steps this week. First, if there is a conflict between you and a team member, commit to resolve it in the next five days. Don't wait. Second, work as a team to come up with healthy ground rules on how to handle conflict when it arises. Agree on these as a team, communicate them, and hold one another accountable.

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

How to Handle Conflict with Your Team

Assess: What are the biggest conflicts we tend to experience as a team?

Team conflict can be negative, demoralizing and demeaning. We've all seen conflict disrupt the unity of a team and stop progress in its tracks.

Four ways to handle conflict with your team:

1. *Cultivate* _____ *team conflict.*

Author and consultant Patrick Lencioni asserts that when a team cannot disagree, debate ideas or have hard conversations, the organization fails to produce results. What's the key to creating healthy conflict with your team? Trust.

2. *Establish conflict* _____.

Culture is the result of whatever you tolerate. If you tolerate murmuring, complaining, backstabbing and conflict among team members, you'll produce a culture with silos, anger and even hostility. Identify your ground rules for conflict resolution, and then communicate them to your team.

3. *Deal with conflict* _____.

Conflict has a way of gathering listeners and growing legs. In other words, when a conflict arises, people tend to share it with anyone who will listen, and those people walk around sharing it with everyone else.

"Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26).

4. *Invest in* _____.

Spend time together (outside of your team environment), eating, celebrating and praying together.

Apply

Take two steps this week. First, if there is a conflict between you and a team member, commit to resolve it in the next five days. Don't wait. Second, work as a team to come up with healthy ground rules on how to handle conflict when it arises. Agree on these as a team, communicate them, and hold one another accountable.

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

How to Handle Conflict in the Congregation

Team Review: What progress have you made toward establishing ground rules for handling conflict with your team? Do they need to be revised in any way?

Assess: What are the biggest conflicts we are experiencing in our congregation right now?

Insights and Ideas

In Matthew 18:15–17, Jesus talked about how to deal with conflict caused by sin. He said, “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

While this passage deals specifically with sin, we can also apply a broader principle of conflict resolution. Generally, conflict resolution in a congregation ought to include three things:

1. **Process.** Jesus articulated a step-by-step process in this passage as it relates to confronting sin in the congregation. Similarly, congregational conflict requires a process if you’re going to handle it effectively. For example, if there is a conflict over purchasing land, relocating, ending a ministry or defunding a program, you must identify the appropriate steps to resolve the conflict. The key is to create the conflict resolution process in advance of conflict with a group of wise, strategic and mature leaders. This enables you to create the process before emotions get in the way.
2. **Progression.** The second thing to notice in Jesus’ illustration is that there was a progression in how the conflict was handled. It started by going directly to the individual in a one-on-one conversation. Eventually, the conflict came before the entire congregation. What’s the lesson in conflict resolution? Never start conflict resolution with the most extreme response. In most cases, a kind, responsible and gracious response in a one-on-one conversation will take care of the conflict. Nobody wants to be embarrassed, and this approach protects the dignity of the individual. However, if a one-on-one conversation doesn’t work, a progressive process that outlines next steps ensures resolution is still possible. Do you have a progressive process for conflict resolution?
3. **People.** Finally, Jesus’ approach involved a variety of people in the process — from key leaders to the entire congregation. Who are the wise leaders who can offer perspective, help and guidance when conflicts arise? Navigating conflict alone can prove detrimental.

To resolve congregational conflict, establish a clear process, ensure the process is progressive in nature (based on the severity of the conflict), and identify wise leaders who can offer keen insight as you progress through the process.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What is our process for dealing with conflict in our congregation?
2. How is our process appropriately progressive, and how does it engage wise leaders?
3. What is a conflict we could apply these principles to right now?

Apply

Work together as a team to develop a plan to wisely address a congregational conflict. Create a process, make it progressive, and include the right people.

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society
How to Handle Conflict in the Congregation

Assess: What are the biggest conflicts we are experiencing in our congregation right now?

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15–17).

Three ingredients for resolving congregational conflict:

1. _____.

Jesus articulated a step-by-step process in this passage as it relates to confronting sin in the congregation. Similarly, congregational conflict requires a process if you’re going to handle it effectively. The key is to create the conflict resolution process in advance of conflict with a group of wise, strategic and mature leaders. This enables you to create the process before emotions get in the way.

2. _____.

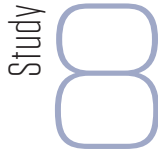
Never start conflict resolution with the most extreme response. In most cases, a kind, responsible and gracious response in a one-on-one conversation will take care of the conflict.

3. _____.

Who are the wise leaders who can offer perspective, help and guidance when conflicts arise? Navigating conflict alone can prove detrimental.

Apply

Work together as a team to develop a plan to wisely address a congregational conflict. Create a process, make it progressive, and include the right people.



Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

How to Handle Conflict in Society

Team Review: What progress have you made toward resolving conflict in your congregation?

Assess: What hot issues in society are producing the greatest levels of conflict?

Insights and Ideas

Society is becoming increasingly complex, as are the issues at play locally, nationally and internationally. Handling these isn't easy, and in today's culture, you may be vilified if you say the wrong thing.

How do we handle conflict in society when the fallout can be unforgiving? Here are three characteristics that should mark our response as Christian leaders:

1. *Biblical clarity.* Our worldview must remain rooted in the teachings of Scripture. Everybody has an opinion, but opinions come and go. We must be grounded in Scripture, and we must teach our congregations to think biblically. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Regularly allow God's Word to judge your thoughts and attitudes, aligning your life with His truth.
2. *Cultural sensitivity.* Too often our cultural backgrounds cloud our response to cultural issues. We forget what it's like to be in somebody else's shoes — to feel their pain, hardship, trials and cultural norms. As a result, we make blanket statements that leave no room for discussion, much less compassion. Keep in mind that every person you disagree with is still made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). You can disagree without being disagreeable. Jesus said, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). One of the best ways to practice the Golden Rule is to listen, understand a person's culture, and exhibit unconditional love.
3. *Personal wisdom.* Finally, it's imperative that we use wisdom in how we handle conflicts in society. Take politics, for example. Perhaps no other issue is creating so much divide. We are first and foremost citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) — not Republicans or Democrats. If you tie your faith to a political party, you will only be disappointed in the end. The gospel is above — not under — any political party. When you share political posts on social media, you may limit your ability to reach 50% of the people God has called you to reach, and maybe even 50% of your congregation. Not everyone thinks like you, much less votes like you. No, you shouldn't give up your biblical values, but use wisdom. Jesus said, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

Reflect and Discuss

1. What are the hottest cultural issues our congregation or community is talking about?
2. Which of the three characteristics above do you struggle with the most? Why?
3. What does it look like to exercise all three of these characteristics in a politically polarizing environment?

Apply

Take time as a team to pray for your congregation, city and nation. Ask God to give you wisdom on how to handle conflicts in society in a way that honors God, demonstrates compassion, and advances the gospel.

Conflict Resolution: How to Successfully Navigate Conflict in Your Home, Team, Church and Society

How to Handle Conflict in Society

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How to respond to conflict in society:

1. *Biblical* _____.

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2. *Cultural* _____.

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3. *Personal* _____.

It's imperative that we use wisdom in how to handle conflicts in society. If you tie your faith to a political party, you will only be disappointed in the end. The gospel is above — not under — any political party.

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Apply

Take time as a team to pray for your congregation, city and nation. Ask God to give you wisdom on how to handle conflicts in society through a way that honors God, demonstrates compassion and advances the gospel.