

# Dealing with conflict

Reason why you have chosen this topic: Conflict happens, even among Christians. Jesus and the writers of the New Testament promised conflict would come – for bad as well as good reasons.

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**BIBLE  
SOCIETY**

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Scripture taken from *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible*

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
1	Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you furious? And why do you look despondent? If you do what is right, won’t you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.	Genesis 4:6-8	Within the first few pages of the Bible, the story shifts from good to bad. Sin corrupts God’s good world and we see the first person-to-person conflict. Not only that, but it’s between brothers. And that’s still not all: Cain kills his brother Abel. The first murder in human history shockingly demonstrates the enormity of sin’s impact – and how humans resist God’s good order and way of relating. <b>What could Cain have done differently in responding to his brother? Are you ever impulsive in your reactions to conflict?</b>	Dear Lord in Heaven, I’m sorry for how similar I can be to Cain. When sin shows up at my door, I can be too quick to invite it in. Keep changing my heart and mind, so they can rule over sin – and not the other way around. Amen.
2	To start a conflict is to release a flood; stop the dispute before it breaks out.	Proverbs 17:14	Like so many other proverbs, this one about the ‘flood’ unleashed by a conflict can initially seem too idealistic. Just stop it before it starts? Really? Sounds like a bumper sticker or Facebook platitude. But conflict can wreck and destroy relationships, and where possible, it could be much better to prevent it from escalating. <b>Have you ever opened the floodgates of conflict? Could you have stopped the dispute before it broke out?</b>	Dear God of peace, there have been times when I have opened the floodgates of conflict. Forgive me for the damage I caused by doing that. Provide me with the words and actions to be able to stop disputes before they break out, Amen.

# Dealing with conflict (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
3	<p>God, arrogant people have attacked me; a gang of ruthless men seeks my life. They have no regard for You. But You, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in faithful love and truth. Turn to me and be gracious to me. Give Your strength to Your servant; save the son of Your female servant.</p>	Psalm 86:14-16	<p>It is not always possible to stop conflict before it starts. Conflict will come, and sometimes it will come against God's people from those who have 'no regard' for God. No one is immune: either it has happened to you, or it's going to happen to you in the future. The Psalmist here reminds us of our powerful ally in times of conflict – God himself. We can pray for deliverance, graciousness and protection, knowing He knows what we need.</p> <p><b>What do you need most when you are in a conflict situation? Have you asked God for it?</b></p>	<p>Dear compassionate and gracious God. You are slow to anger and rich in faithful love and truth. When I am feeling attacked or under great stress, inspire me to call out to you and to seek your strength. Please turn to me and be gracious to me. In Jesus' name, Amen.</p>
4	<p>He set military commanders over the people and gathered the people in the square of the city gate. Then he encouraged them, saying, "Be strong and courageous! Don't be afraid or discouraged before the king of Assyria or before the large army that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. He has only human strength, but we have Yahweh our God to help us and to fight our battles." So the people relied on the words of King Hezekiah of Judah.</p>	2 Chronicles 32:6-8	<p>Sometimes it seems like the kings of the Old Testament are always in conflict! If it's not with other rulers, then it's conflict with other nations, or conflict with God himself! But with his people now up against the mortal limitations of human conflict, King Hezekiah (of Judah) reminds them that they have Yahweh's supernatural strength on their side. The mighty help of God is at hand, so there's no reason to fear or be discouraged.</p> <p><b>Do you accept God's help as readily as Hezekiah? What will it look like for you to be more courageous, and less discouraged?</b></p>	<p>Almighty God, we praise you for your awesome strength. Thank you for displaying it in the past and helping your people to see why it should hearten them to be strong and courageous. Give us the stamina and clarity to rely upon you and your powerful word, no matter the situation. Amen.</p>

# Dealing with conflict (continued)

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5	But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah. For He is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In His flesh, He made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that He might create in Himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace.	Ephesians 2:13-15	<p>It grieves us when we fight with others, but that's the least of our troubles – we are also in conflict with our creator. The rift between humans and God is colossal, thanks to our sin. But, thank God, there's hope. Not because of anything we do, but all thanks to God's great grace, the sinful barrier between us and God is obliterated by Jesus' blood. Peace replaces cosmic hostility, as Jesus unites those who believe in Him into one unified body of God's redeemed people.</p> <p><b>Do you think you could learn anything from Jesus as you go about dealing with conflict in your life?</b></p>	Heavenly father, we should be gobsmacked at what Jesus did to resolve conflict between us and you – and between me and other people. His sacrifice has brought about such a wonderful peace and expansive unity that I want my life to be a testimony to them. Guide me to live in that radical truth. Amen.
6	Therefore, God's chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive.	Colossians 3:12-13	<p>Jesus is Lord of your life, and not just on Sundays. So Jesus is near to you, even when you are in conflict with a colleague, friend or family member. And as his followers, the Bible tells us to emulate Jesus' actions, even the tricky ones, like "as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive." Certainly, such forgiveness is not easy, and there are many situations where forgiveness isn't the most appropriate or safest response, in the first place. But it is still a powerful tool when it comes to resolution of conflict.</p> <p><b>Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there someone from whom you need to ask forgiveness?</b></p>	Dear God of immense forgiveness. I ask for your Spirit to fill me with the kinds of characteristics mentioned in Colossians 3. Arm me with them so that when conflict comes, I can use them – and the weapon of forgiveness – to bring about meaningful resolution. I ask this in the name of Jesus, who offers the ultimate forgiveness, Amen.

# Dealing with conflict (continued)

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7	What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from the cravings that are at war within you? You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your evil desires.	James 4:1-3	<p>I doubt I am the only one who finds it hard to admit when I have been wrong, and need to ask for forgiveness. But in stark contrast, the letter of James is a point-blank prompt to admit where conflict comes from. It comes from within us. Well now, that's confronting.</p> <p><b>Think of one time when you have you been the source of conflict, yet failed to admit it? Confess it to God, who loves to forgive you.</b></p>	God of harmony and love. Make it clear to me when my cravings or wrong motives or evil desires are inflaming situations of conflict. Spur me on to bring my requests to You, trusting that You hear me. And help me to ask with a heart fuelled by selflessness and fellowship. Amen.
8	"If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he won't listen, take one or two more with you, so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established. If he pays no attention to them, tell the church. But if he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like an unbeliever and a tax collector to you."	Matthew 18:15-17	<p>Conflict makes most of us uncomfortable; in fact, I have a colleague who wants to crawl under the desk as soon as someone raises their voice. It is easy for us to think that conflict is incompatible with the unity, peace and love which should characterise the Christian family. But conflict can come, even to Christians – a sad reality that's noted by Jesus himself. But Jesus doesn't focus on the conflict itself, rather he wants people to move through conflict to restored relationships.</p> <p><b>Is there someone in your life you need to be reconciled with? Is there something you can do about it today?</b></p>	Dear heavenly father, we can all be guilty of sinning against a brother or sister in Christ. If I am sinning against someone, give me the humility to hear their rebuke and strength to change. If someone has sinned against me, soften their heart to hear what Your people are advising them to do. We ask this in Jesus's powerful name, Amen.

# Dealing with conflict (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
9	Brothers, if someone is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual should restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so you also won't be tempted. Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.	Galatians 6:1-3	<p>Let's face it, there seems to be a lot of passive aggressive behaviour by Christians, particularly on the internet. But we are not called to be judgemental or critical with our Christian brothers and sisters, but rather <i>gentle</i>, as we disagree with others. God's people are not to ignore or flee conflict. Arguments, pain and frustration will probably emerge when trying to 'restore' someone - but that shouldn't stop us from trying.</p> <p><b>Think of someone you know who seems 'caught in wrongdoing'. How can you help them, without being judgemental or getting caught up in what they are doing?</b></p>	God, You know I can give in to the temptation to do something wrong, rather than follow in your ways. Keep me from giving in to that temptation, even as I try to help a brother or sister who is caught in a struggle with sinful behaviour. Make me able to carry their burdens and not be deceived by pride in myself. Amen.
10	So then, my brothers, you are dearly loved and longed for—my joy and crown. In this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!	Philippians 4:1-4	<p>I'm not a fan of arguments or conflict. I often try to avoid them. But, sometimes, that's just not possible - or responsible. I'm struck by how God's word doesn't instruct me to instantly flee from a disagreement, much as I might want to. Jesus' followers are called to strive for agreement (not run for the non-confrontational hills). Indeed, their fellow believers are told to urge them in the direction of standing together in the Lord. As we navigate the murky waters of conflict, our eyes should always be fixed on the outcome: rejoicing together in the Lord.</p> <p><b>How can you encourage rejoicing among those who are at conflict, without appearing naïve?</b></p>	Loving heavenly father, I have been happily reminded by Philippians 4 of how I should be rejoicing in you always. When I see other Christians at odds with each other, give me the courage and sensitivity to urge them to agree in a way that glorifies you. Thank you for giving us reason to rejoice in unity with Christ, and not despair in hopeless division. Amen.

# Dealing with conflict (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
11	A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath.	Proverbs 15:1	<p>Sometimes it's just not possible to avoid conflict, no matter how hard we try. If conflict does erupt, listen to the wisdom of Proverbs 15:1. A gentle answer rather than a harsh word is not just because it's nicer to be nice. You'll see the difference in what happens next: either the conflict will be doused in grace, or inflamed into wildfire.</p> <p><b>Are you a 'gentle answer' or 'harsh word' person?</b></p>	<p>Dear God of infinite mercy. Too often I can be tempted to lash out with a harsh word, rather than a gentle answer. Keep me grounded in knowing you are best placed to stir up wrath against injustice and wrongs. Make me a person who yearns to turn away from anger. Amen.</p>
12	“But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating bribes. Place them over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. They should judge the people at all times. Then they can bring you every important case but judge every minor case themselves. In this way you will lighten your load, and they will bear it with you. If you do this, and God so directs you, you will be able to endure, and also all these people will be able to go home satisfied.”	Exodus 18:21-23	<p>Perhaps you already know a thing or two about conflict resolution. Or perhaps you are the kind of person who runs for the hills at the slightest sign of conflict. No matter where you are at, one thing is certain: you can't be the only peacemaker around. Sadly, there's too much conflict for only one person to resolve. Moses can't do everything – especially if he wants to go the distance AND be effective. Neither can you.</p> <p><b>Do you ever feel like you spend too much time keeping the peace in your workplace or family? Ask God to provide a way out for you.</b></p>	<p>Dear God, giver of gifts, skills and abilities. You have placed me in this particular place and presented opportunities for me to be a peacemaker. But I have limitations and cannot respond effectively to EVERYTHING happening around me. Bring other people in, to ease my load and to be of great assistance to those going through conflict. Amen.</p>

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Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
13	So if you consider me a partner, accept him as you would me. And if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self. Yes, brother, may I have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.	Philemon 17-20	<p>What has gone on between Philemon and his former slave Onesimus isn't entirely clear. But what is clear is Paul's desire to help these Christian brothers to be united, not divided. Paul dares to step into their conflict, appealing to their common basis of love. But he goes further, offering to incur personal and financial loss for their spiritual gain. Such zeal for Christian unity is a memorable spur to us, when confronted by the fractures which can occur within fellowship.</p> <p><b>What lengths are you prepared to go to, to help other Christians resolve their conflict? What holds you back?</b></p>	Dear God who refreshes hearts in the power and wonder of Jesus Christ. The example Paul sets in his letter to Philemon is impressive and intimidating. But stop me from being overwhelmed by what he suggests to Philemon. Instead, give me the desire to go to huge lengths – and potential loss – for the spiritual gain of others. Amen.
14	But Joseph said to them, “Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people.”	Genesis 50:19-20	<p>What happens after conflict has been resolved? It can be easy to harbour guilt or hostility or doubt or other negative emotions towards those we were at odds with. Joseph's outlook on conflict – its damage and outcomes – kept God's plans as the primary filter. Without pretending it's easy to praise God's glory amid conflict, the witness of Joseph should inspire us to remember our place – and God's – in everything we do.</p> <p><b>Do you hold on to conflict even after it has been resolved? Hand it to Jesus, knowing he cares for you.</b></p>	God of wisdom, compassion and peace. Prompt me to reflect steadily upon what your word teaches about conflict resolution, and comfort me with the knowledge that you can even work good things through terrible situations. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.