

# **Pursuing Healthy, Biblical Conflict Resolution**

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## **Introduction**

We live in a fallen, sinful world and each of us is a fallen, sinful human being. Conflict is inevitable. Because sinful human beings interact with one another, there will be conflict, disagreement, and misunderstanding.

Due to increased division and polarization, more anger and hatred have entered our speech, discussions, and reactions. Therefore, we risk losing our capacity to engage in civil discourse, to agreeably disagree.

There is hope and help for us in God's Word. God anticipated our need for wisdom on how to do conflict wisely and well, and He has given us much Godly counsel in His Word.

## **Assumptions**

*First*, Lynden Christian School is an intentionally Christian community founded and established on Christian principles drawn from Scripture. We are deeply committed to living out our words and actions in a manner consistent with the standards of the Bible which we believe is God's holy and inspired Word (II Timothy 3:16-17).

*Second*, our highest commitment and chief priority is to glorify God in everything we say and do (I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17). We put God's honor and glory above our own interests, thoughts, and desires.

*Third*, we recognize every relationship and every conflict involves at least three persons: God and two human beings created by God and made in His image. God is party to every thought and every word spoken in every conflict; He sees it, hears it and He is in the midst of it (Hebrews 4:13; Matthew 12:36-37). When Christians accept God's presence in conversations and meetings, His presence will moderate and influence the words spoken through humility and grace.

God sees each person as made in His image. Both persons are sinners and He loves each one equally. Though we are all chief among sinners (I Timothy 1:15-16), God still loves each of us. This perspective should help cultivate humility, grace and peace seeking.

There are two key parts to healthy, Biblical conflict resolution: A.) what you do before the conflict, and B.) what you do during it. How you prepare for the conflict and how you handle the actual conflict.

## **Process**

### **A. Preparing for Healthy, Biblical Conflict Resolution**

There are several steps we should take before we ever talk to the person with whom we have a conflict. The better we practice these preliminary steps the better hope we can have of resolution and reconciliation.

While it is good to deal with conflict quickly, it must not be done without taking time to prepare. Even if we must prepare quickly, prepare first, then go.

### ***1. The first step to preparation is to be spiritual.***

**Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted (all Scripture quotes are from the English Standard Version (ESV)).

This passage applies to more than just sinful transgressions. It also guides Christians in resolving disagreements, misunderstandings, and differences of opinion.

“You who are spiritual” refers to the person who shows maturity, a person who acts like a Christian in the moment, and who is more under the influence of the Spirit than the flesh.

Spiritual maturity begins in the heart. Being right is not enough; your heart must be right as well. We must be right with God before we can hope to be right with one another.

All conflict begins in the heart. We have been hurt, wronged, offended, had our rights or expectations or desires dismissed or trampled on. We are on the path to getting “spiritual” when we examine our own heart.

The Bible says *all* have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Let us honestly and humbly consider our own sinful contributions to a problem or conflict before we confront someone else.

Jesus gives excellent wisdom for how to search and examine our own hearts and thoughts.

### ***2. Second, Look at the log in your own eye.***

**Matthew 7:3-5** Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, ***first take the log out of your own eye***, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Picture a person with a 2x12 sticking out of their eye coming up to you and saying, “Here let me get that little piece of sawdust out of the corner of your eye.”

There are two sets of eyes in this passage; look in your own first. It’s so easy to confess other people’s sins. Our vision is 20/20 when we look at others but when we look in the mirror we are legally blind, 20/400.

Before we confront another person, we must take time to prayerfully examine our own hearts. Before we go to the other person, let us go to the Lord and do some self-reflection. Thinking we’re not part of the problem is often part of the problem.

Can you identify your contribution to the conflict? Have you been angry, have you lashed out, have you tried to win at the expense of another's interests? Have you harbored bitterness, resentment, have you gossiped about the other person? What are you afraid of? Where is Satan working, where are you giving him an opportunity?

Whatever your sinful contribution you must repent of any sins against God and others and then move your heart to an attitude of humility and grace. Only then will there be hope of reconciliation and peace.

The purpose of self-reflection is not to identify where blame lies or who is at fault. The purpose is to sufficiently prepare your heart to handle the conflict in a manner that glorifies God.

Self-reflection also helps us more clearly identify the problem, nature of the conflict, or point of disagreement. It is nearly impossible to achieve clarity on nature of the problem with our self-reflection guided by God's principles.

### ***3. Third, pray forgiveness and blessing.***

**Matthew 6:12** Forgive those who sin against us

**Ephesians 4:32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

**Colossians 3:13** Bear with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgive each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Before you confront another person, pray for that person and for your relationship and ask the Holy Spirit to work in both of your hearts. Ask God to do the impossible, that's what He specializes in. He can restore and reconcile whatever difficult circumstance we find ourselves in.

Ask God to forgive the sin in both of you and ask for God's blessing on both of you. Prayers for forgiveness and blessing drain away anger, bitterness, disappointment. Christians are the most forgiven people in the world. So, we should be the most forgiving people in the world. God's forgiveness is meant to leave a lasting impression on us, a life changing impression.

For the sake of the glory of the grace of God, let's forgive all the debts of sin owed to all of us by everyone every day.

***Finally, if possible chose to overlook any offense.***

**Proverbs 19:11** Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

After self-reflection, prayer and forgiveness, if possible make the choice to overlook any offense or sin against you. If you are able to let it go and be free from it without frequently revisiting it, then let it go. Release it to God, lay it at the cross and move on.

But if not, then we move to the second stage of conflict resolution, from preparation to engaging.

## **B. Engaging in Healthy, Biblical Conflict Resolution.**

Taken together Jesus' words in Matthew 5:23-26 and 18:13-15 give five principles for seeking and pursuing healthy, Biblical conflict resolution and reconciliation and can be applied to nearly every relationship in most situations.

The five principles are:

- You go.
- You go quickly.
- You go quickly to the person.
- You go quickly to the person in person.
- You go quickly to the person in person to be reconciled.

**The first step to healthy, Biblical conflict resolution and reconciliation is, you go.**

You go. Don't wait for the other person. Be a peacemaker, not a peace waiter. Seek peace and pursue it. Aggressively love your neighbor. Real reconciliation is proactive. It takes the initiative.

God shows His great love for us in that while we were sinners and while it was we who sinned against Him, yet He came to us first. He took the first step toward us to restore our relationship.

**The second step to healthy, Biblical conflict resolution and reconciliation is, you go quickly.**

Real reconciliation is quick to listen, quick to action, because two great things are at stake. Our relationship with God and our eternal soul.

*First*, our relationship with God is at stake. We are out of fellowship with Him as long as we are out of fellowship with each other.

*Second*, our own souls are at stake. Anger and hatred harbored in our hearts become a foothold for Satan, an open door inviting him to come in. Ephesians 4:26-27 says, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil." Dealing quickly with anger is resisting the devil.

You may recall the previous section counseled us not to be too hasty but to take time to examine ourselves and cool down. Don't be hasty, but don't take so long that your anger grows. Generally sooner is better than later.

**The third step to healthy, Biblical conflict resolution is, you go quickly to the person.**

You go quickly to the person, not to family, friends and neighbors, but only to the person involved. We must break the habit of talking about people and start the habit of talking to people.

Jesus says in **Matthew 18:15** "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."

According to Scripture we have two choices, we can talk to the person involved or to no one. The only people who should know about the conflict should be those who are directly involved in it. Keep the matter as small as possible for as long as possible.

There might be a situation where you need some help with conflict, some wisdom, some counsel as to what to do or how to proceed. One way you can do this without poisoning the well or trying to win people to your side, is not to share who the individual is. This shows you are more interested in seeking peace than in winning the argument.

**The fourth step to righteous relationships is, you go quickly to the person in person.**

You go quickly to the person in person if at all possible. Go to them face to face. Don't deal with sensitive matters by text or email. Even by phone is not ideal. Be face to face, be in relationship. Jesus did this when He came to us in the flesh.

Generally it is not a good idea to write a letter or send an email when dealing with a conflict, because many times we will put things in a letter that we wouldn't say in person. Going to the person in person honors that person and protects your relationship from further injury or misunderstanding.

If you are afraid going to the person in person could escalate into a bigger fight, the fifth principle will help.

**The fifth step to healthy, Biblical conflict resolution is, you go quickly to the person in person to be reconciled.**

You go quickly to the person in person with the goal of being reconciled, not to get even or take revenge or attack or accuse or even win.

If you have taken the first steps of self-reflection and preparation beforehand you will go seeking peace and reconciliation. If you have humbled yourself before God, if you have looked for the log in your own eye first and confessed your own sins, if you honor the other person as created in the image of God and loved by God, if you have prayed for them and for your relationship, and have a sincere desire to be reconciled, then you will go with an attitude of love and mercy and grace toward them. You will go assuming and expecting the best, ready to give and receive forgiveness.

### **C. The Fruit of Healthy, Biblical Conflict Resolution**

After conflict, then what?

Christians are the most forgiven people in the world, and they should be the most forgiving people in the world. There is a direct relationship between Christ's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of one another. In other words, the goal in all conflict is to be reconciled, to give and receive forgiveness.

In conflict where there is sin, seek forgiveness. Jesus taught us to pray for the forgiveness of our sins and in the same breath He taught us to forgive those who have sinned against us. They are two sides of the same coin.

**Ephesians 4:32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Forgiveness is not a feeling, it is an act of the will. Forgiveness is not forgetting, it is a deliberate choice to no longer dwell on the sin or let it have a hook in us. Forgiveness is not excusing or saying the sin is no big deal. Sin is a big deal, and forgiveness deals with it honestly.

In other words, the goal in all conflict is to be reconciled, to give and receive forgiveness.

Go assuming and expecting the best. Not dwelling on it, not bringing it up again, not telling others, and choosing to not let it hinder the relationship. Abstract – make same correction.

In a conflict where there is no sin, but is caused by misunderstanding or disagreement, reconciliation will look different. If the misunderstanding or disagreement can't be resolved or cleared up, then our goal is peace, shalom.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we set our relationship in Christ as more important than the issue between us.

Abraham and his nephew, Lot, resolved their differences by settling in different places, but they maintained a relationship, and Abraham came to Lot's aid on more than one occasion. Some chose to follow Paul and some followed Peter, but that the power of the cross not be lost, we together follow Christ, not letting our differences separate us or severe relationships.

**Philippians 2:3-4** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Work together to listen and understand the other person's perspective. Search together for a solution, and lacking that, then a mutually agreed upon compromise. Strive to be objective and reasonable. Keep emotions under control. Be patient and humble, take the high road, and be willing to push pause, and take more time for prayer and seeking God's wisdom and will.

**Ephesians 4:1-3** I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

**Romans 12:10, 18** Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

## **Conclusion**

**Psalms 133:1** Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

Peacemaking is taking the Gospel we have received and applying it to our relationships. It is taking what God has done for us and doing it for others.

Do we care enough to go, to go quickly, to the person in person, and insofar as it depends on us to seek forgiveness, peace and reconciliation?

**I Corinthians 10:31** Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.