

NAVIGATING FAMILY CONFLICT

A 5 Day Devotional Series



LEGACY
STONE

WELCOME!



Welcome to the journey of moving through conflict toward greater peace and relational repair in your family!

There are three foundational principles to keep in mind as you navigate conflict:

1. **Every family experiences conflict.** The Apostle Paul had conflict with Peter, Barnabas, and John Mark. Even Jesus had conflict in his family! (Read Mark 3) And if Jesus and Paul experienced conflict, your family will, too. It's not **IF** your family will have conflict, it's **WHEN** your family will have conflict and how you will respond to it.
2. **We feel threatened by conflict.** When we feel threatened, we move toward flight or fight most of the time. This means we respond to conflict with either silence (we flee) or violence (we try to force others to agree with us).
3. **The Bible gives practical steps to resolving conflict.** These steps are easy to understand, but difficult to follow. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit and the help of one another can we effectively move through conflict to peace and relational repair.

Devotional Outline

Day 1: Created for Relationship

Day 2: Shame and Hiding

Day 3: Move Toward the Conflict

Day 4: Speaking the Truth in Love

Day 5: Creating Safe Spaces

A personal word...

Sandi and I have been married for over 30 years now and we've experienced plenty of conflict in our marriage, as parents, in our families, in ministry, with friends, and at work. Like everybody else, we don't like conflict and for many years we tried our best to simply ignore it and hope it would go away. But that never worked out for us. It kept coming back (with interest)!

The five biblical concepts I lay out in these devotionals are intended to change the way we think about conflict. I also offer a few practical suggestions for how you can get started moving through conflict to win people back into relationship. Think of this short series as an appetizer – I hope it makes you hungry for the bigger meal God wants for you!



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CREATED FOR RELATIONSHIP

“How did we ever get into this mess?”

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ~ Genesis 1:27

Have you ever stopped for a moment, thought about your marriage or some other important family relationship, and asked, “What went wrong?”

I’ve had several of those moments! I asked that question after 10 years of feeling stuck and powerless to get past a recurring conflict with my wife. Sandi and I asked ourselves that question with each of our three children as we attempted to navigate the turbulent waters of adolescence and young adulthood. Let’s be honest; it’s a common question for many of us, even if we don’t ask it out loud.

But before we attempt to answer that question, we need to ask a different one, namely: “What was it like before all the conflict and heartbreak?”

You see, God didn’t create us for conflict. He created us for love, joy, and peace. In fact, He intentionally designed us for life-giving relationships: first with Himself, then with other people (starting with our family), and finally with the rest of creation. God created Adam and Eve in His own image, and because God is not a “ME”, but a “WE”, that means they were created with a special longing and capacity for loving, interdependent relationships to better reflect our Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who created them.

So, no matter what kind of mess your family may find itself in today, take courage that we trust a God who lives in perfect relationship, who created us for relationships, and who is actively redeeming a lost and broken world through the good news of Jesus Christ back into right relationships. His desire is to give you the grace and knowledge to lead your family through conflict back to the peace and community originally intended.

Conflict is not what God created us for (despite what our experience may suggest). While some conflict can stimulate growth and maturity, the presence of conflict reveals that our hearts aren’t fully surrendered and filled with the love and wisdom of God yet. One day we will live in a world free of conflict, but until that day we must learn how to face it with the truth and love of Christ.

REFLECT

- What do you want most for your family? Tell that to God and ask Him to grant that desire. Tell that to a trusted friend and ask them to pray for you and your family.
- As God begins answering that prayer, He will start with you. What attitudes, resentments, or contributions to family conflict do you need to confess and take ownership for? Who in your family do you need to share this with?

SHAME AND HIDING

“How does our shame create conflict?”

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. ~ Genesis 2:25

Have you ever wondered why the Bible mentions shame before the first sin was ever committed? Think about it. Adam and Eve are brought together to better reflect God’s image as male and female in the covenant of marriage, and we are told they were “both naked, and they felt no shame.”

What is shame, and how is it different from guilt? Guilt is feeling remorse for something hurtful that you did, while shame is feeling bad because of who you are. Guilty people do bad things, shameful people feel like they are bad people – flawed and unworthy of love.

We know Adam and Eve felt no shame at first because they weren’t worried about what the other thought of them, they didn’t fear rejection or harm, and they didn’t feel the need to protect themselves. And so, they were comfortable with each other with nothing to hide behind (not even clothing).

But after they were deceived and sinned, conflict ensued. They began:

- Hiding from God (they hid from God in the vegetation; they now feared him because they knew they were naked)
- Hiding from each other (they sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness because they no longer felt safe enough to be vulnerable)

The presence of shame created conflict, internally and relationally. Their immediate response was to hide (the “flight” response). But once they came out of hiding it got even worse when God asked them, “What have you done?”

Adam lashes out at God and says, “This woman you gave me offered me the fruit!” In other words, it’s God’s fault and Eve’s fault! Adam accepts no responsibility for his sinful choices. (This is the “fight” response.) Eve follows up by saying, “This serpent you put in the garden deceived me, so I ate.” Yep – once again it must be God’s fault. (Who put this serpent in the Garden in the first place?) But also, she blames the serpent. Neither Adam or Eve confessed their sin, they both pointed the finger of blame back at God, each other, and the serpent.

We have conflict in our families because we all feel shame at some level. The deeper the shame, the more we hide, lash out, and blame others. And once our shame gets triggered, mistrust, resentment, anger, and eventually conflict always follows.

REFLECT

- Can you identify shame messages, maybe from your childhood, that motivate you to go into hiding or react defensively to protect yourself? If so, what are those messages?
- Look up 1 John 1:9. Rather than hiding, is there something you need to confess to God or someone in your family?

MOVING TOWARD THE CONFLICT

“Ouch, that really hurt! Now what am I supposed to do?”

“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.” ~ Matthew 18:15

Remember in the introduction we said, “These steps are easy to understand, but difficult to follow.”? Well, today we start with often the most difficult step of them all: going directly to the person who caused the hurt to attempt to restore relationship.

Here are the three biggest obstacles you must overcome to follow Jesus’ instructions:

1. You must go to them first. (You can’t wait for them to come to you.)

This is the step most of us get wrong most of the time, right? Rather than talking to the person who offended us, we talk to someone else first. Why do we do this? It goes back to how we react when threatened – we run away (flight) to avoid conflict, or we enlist others to support us against them (fight). Both reactions lead to greater conflict, never to peace and relational repair. You must stop, turn around, and go directly to the person you are experiencing conflict with.

2. You must go to them privately. (And in person)

When Jesus gave these instructions, email, texting, and posting on social media were not options. How many times have we taken the easy way out by shooting off a curt text or unloading via an email instead of having the consideration to speak with them face-to-face? When we ignore this step, we can count on the conflict getting more entrenched, more people getting sucked in, and the problem continuing to grow.

3. You must point out the offense. (While recognizing your own flaws.)

We will discuss more on how to do this in the next two devotionals, but for now let’s all agree that we must talk about the relevant issue. Identify the root problem. For example: If I am upset because my spouse is scrolling on their phone instead of engaging with me and our children, I need to communicate that request and what is being felt.

But before we “point out the offense” we also need to check our motives by asking two questions:

- Why am I really doing this?
- What do I really want?

Beware of any motive or desire other than to win the person back into a healthy relationship. If what you really want is revenge, to be right, or conversely to take the blame for everything just to get along, you’re not ready yet. In that case your next step is to ask God to soften your heart or give more courage.

REFLECT

- Is there someone who hurt or wronged you that you want to win back into relationship?
- Do you feel stuck in conflict, but haven’t yet taken ownership for your contribution?

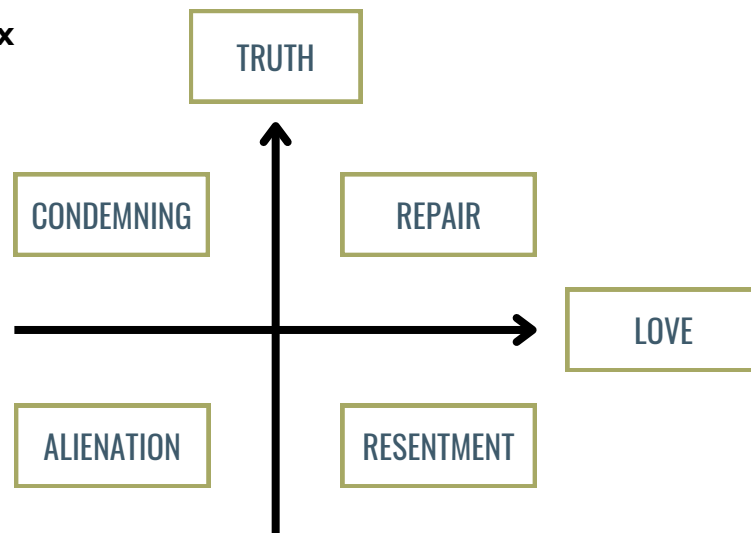
SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Why “telling it like it is” or always “being nice” aren’t enough.

“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

Has someone ever yelled at you, said hurtful things, and later offered the excuse, “Well, I was just telling the truth”? Or have you ever failed to speak up when someone was clearly out of line because you wanted to be “nice”? (That pent up hurt and resentment came out sideways eventually, didn’t it?) Consider the matrix below:

Truth/Love Matrix



- When we speak the truth in love, we can move from conflict to relational repair. (Upper Right)
- When we speak truth without love, we judge and condemn. (Upper Left)
- When we speak love without truth, we placate others but feel resentful. (Bottom Right)
- When we get stuck in condemnation or resentment too long, the relationship dies. (Bottom Left)

So, are you the type of person who tends to speak truth, but lacks empathy, gentleness, and a deep concern for the welfare of the other person? If so, you need to calibrate more love in your communication.

Or are you the type of person who tends to speak lovingly, but struggles to say what you really think and feel because you are too anxious about upsetting the other person? If so, you need to calibrate more truth in your communication.

REFLECT

- Show this matrix to a trusted friend (someone who knows you well and has a track record of speaking the truth in love) and ask them for feedback on your tendencies.
- Once you determine your tendency, decide upon one action step this week to speak with more truth or more love and tell someone about your decision.

CREATING SAFE SPACES

“How can you make a safe space for a dangerous conversation?”

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.’ ~ Matthew 18:16

Conversations where opinions vary, emotions are hot, and something important is at stake are inherently dangerous. It’s like walking through a mine field! Remember, when we feel threatened, our brains prepare our bodies for flight or fight – before we even realize it. So, to resolve conflict, we must first create more safety. How can we do that?

Going back to Day 3, we get a big clue – Jesus tells us to go to the person we are experiencing conflict with privately and personally. By not confronting them publicly, by not firing off an angry email, by going to them instead of waiting for them to come to us, and by speaking honestly to the person involved instead of talking to others, we create more safety.

But what if that doesn’t work? What if they refuse to discuss the issue, get angry and yell, or simply maintain their defensive posture? Jesus, anticipating these challenges, goes on to say that “if they will not listen, take one or two others along”.

Involving the right third party in the right way provides more safety for them and for you. In the presence of a mature, objective, trusted witness the conflict can be addressed again – hopefully with a better outcome. The third person in the room (if they are respected and trusted by both parties) creates another layer of safety.

Here are a few experiences we’ve had with this:

1. My wife and I reached out to our pastor to help us resolve a few issues in our marriage that we kept trying to talk about but always ended up fighting over.
2. I was part of a regional team sent to work with a church whose pastor and leadership team were at odds and ready to split the church.
3. Our family reached out to a counselor when one of our children became depressed and started acting out in harmful ways.

In each of those situations, safety increased, and the conflict got resolved. (Of course, it still took time and a great deal of prayer and effort!) After the conflict became entrenched, the deciding factor was inviting the right person into the conversation to make both parties feel heard, understood, and taken seriously. As the fight or flight reactions subsided, constructive communication could take place.

REFLECT

- If you found yourself stuck in conflict with a close friend or family member that didn’t resolve after you went to them personally and privately, who would you invite in as a “witness”?
- If someone came to you and requested a private conversation to resolve an issue, how might you keep yourself from reverting to “flight” or “fight”?

MEANT FOR RESTORATION

Now that you have made it through this little devotional series, keep moving forward in your journey to reconciliation. A few potential steps you can take:

- Go through this devotional with a friend or another trusted person to help you learn and identify your own blindspots.
- Write down your key reflections and identify what areas of your life may need to change.
- Choose an intentional way you will pray over the conflict in your life and reframe your attitude about the situation.
- Seek godly counsel if needed to help you make progress on the situations.

There always is a path forward, even if it may look different or not in the timing you expected. Stay committed to growth and honoring God. Ultimately, navigating conflict is what it looks like to model the gospel so embrace that opportunity.

WANT MORE RESOURCES?

Visit legacystone.com/resources and look for our section on conflict and communication to find practical tools and insights to help you in this process.