

Home Improvement Series: Building Healthy Relationships

Part Two: "How to Resolve Conflict"

Pastor Dale Campfield - July 4th, 2010

Intro:

Matt 28:19 *"Go and make disciples of all nations..."*

ECC Process of Discipleship: Making an IMPACT...To Love...To Grow...To Serve

We have 3 priorities – To love...which is expressed in our Sunday morning celebration and connection groups. To grow...which is expressed in our Path to Discipleship. To serve...which is expressed in our daily lives in the places we live, work and play; as well as through the local church. The vision of E.C.C. is to gather together weekly for corporate worship, loving God and each other; then to come together in small Connection Groups for discipleship and fellowship, and are regularly involved in reaching out to others with the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through community outreach. To Love...To Grow...To Serve!

Philippians 2:2

"Live together in harmony and love, as though you only had one mind and spirit between you."

Circle "harmony", "love", and "one mind".

God's ideal for your relationships, whether you're married or not (even if you're not married you're going to get a lot out of this series because it's about relationships) is harmony, intimacy (love) and unity (one mind). The reality is that a lot of our relationships are disharmony, conflict and disappointment.

Ephesians 4:3

"Make every one of you keep the unity of the Spirit."

Today's message title is...

Part Two: "How to Resolve Conflict"

Each week, we are memorizing different Bible passages that relate to building healthy relationships. This week, we've memorized...

Ephesians 4:2

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Proverbs 13:17

A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy brings healing.

James 4:1

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

It's July 4th – a day of Fireworks!

Have you had FIREWORKS go off in your relationships? Sometimes the fireworks are fun and blissful, but at other times, it's a war zone. That's the kind of fireworks we don't need. The fireworks of conflict in our lives.

My bride Cathi and I have been married 30 years this August 2nd, and we've had both kinds of fireworks go off throughout that time. The fireworks of love and delight are a whole lot more fun than the others, but we still have to deal with them.

In getting ready for this message, I thought about some of the conflicts that Butch, my wife (that's her nickname), and I have faced. This is very fresh on my heart -- all these principles we're going to talk about. And I found out that they work. They give help to resolve conflict in everyday life. In your life, whether you're single or married, we all have to deal with conflict in those relationships. So, this message works for everyone.

Jesus, one time, in giving an illustration about the home talked about the danger of conflict in the home.

Mark 3:25

"A home filled with strife and division destroys itself."

There's a real danger with conflict. Conflict can kill a marriage. Conflict can kill a friendship. Conflict is how we even label some wars, i.e. the Afghanistan conflict.

I think there should be a mandatory law that, before you get married, you have to take a class on how you handle conflict. We all know there's going to be conflict in a marriage. There should be a class. We know it's going to happen, we need to get ready for it. That's what we're going to do today. We're going to take a few minutes to take a look at what the Bible has to say on how we understand conflict and resolve it in our lives. Married or single, we have to know how to deal with it. If you're single you can obviously use these with your kids or at work, with friends. All relationships involve conflict. There's three things we need to understand to help us overcome that conflict.

- **The reason for conflict**
- **How we respond to conflict**
- **How to resolve conflict**

These are the three things we're going to focus on today.

I. THE REASON FOR CONFLICT

If you're going to overcome conflict in your life you have to understand first of all the reason for it, why is it there? The Bible is very clear about this, it's almost blunt. It's one of our memory verses this week...

James 4:1

"Do you know where your fights and arguments come from? They come from the selfish desires that war within you."

That's where they come from. That's why we all face conflict as a part of our human nature. Competing desires -- that's why we have conflict. I want what I want, and you want what you want.

We can see this even in the little things of life. This is why they have dual controls on electric blankets. We compete over the tiniest things. Should towels be folded in half or thirds. Should the toilet paper loop over or under. All of these things become huge issues. Why? Because we're different. Conflict is inevitable. It's not only because we're selfish but because we're different. These differences make us think, "I want my way; you want your way." That makes selfishness come up.

It makes some couples feel like first down markers at a football game. You're chained together but you're always ten yards apart. On your wedding day you had many unspoken expectations. When you said, "I do", there were a lot of unspoken expectations behind that. "This is how this marriage is going to meet my needs." We think that as soon as we get to know each other a little bit, things will work out. The longer you're married and the closer you get to each other, the more you begin to recognize the differences in one another's lives. The more you recognize the differences, the more opportunity there is for conflict in life. The conflict opportunity is always there.

The major question we all have in our marriage, when we first got married especially, is how am I going to get my needs met? I don't care how much you love your husband/wife when you got married, you didn't marry them to meet their needs. No matter how much you loved them, you married them because you had some needs in your life. Yes, you loved them and, yes, you wanted to see their needs met too, but your major motivation were the needs in your life that you wanted to see met. When those needs go unmet this reason for conflict rears its ugly head. My way versus their way.

Illus: Even on a Sunday morning, including today, my desire is for Butch to tell me what she thinks would look good on me to wear for the day. Even though I ask, I still have something in mind that I want to wear and I'm secretly hoping she chooses my desires. Most of the time, we have conflict because she chooses something different from what I want... conflict ensues. It seems silly, and it is, but it happens.

Illus: Even within our staff, in a Monday afternoon church staff meeting, we'll have conflict. One pastor will see things one way, the others will see it another way, and we have conflict. It's normal to have conflict, but we have to know how to deal with it.

The reason for conflict is our competing desires. Once you understand that, you're ready to take a look at how to respond to the conflict that happens in our hearts. We respond in different ways and it makes some of you think you don't really have any conflict. It's not that you don't have conflict, you just respond in a different way than people are used to talking about.

II. HOW WE RESPOND TO CONFLICT

As we look at these responses let me remind you of the verse in...

Psalm 139:23 David wrote...

"Search me, O God, and know my heart and test my thoughts."

Whenever I try to start thinking about what's the reason I do something, this is a prayer that I pray. "Lord, would You help me to understand myself." I realize I don't understand myself a lot of times. I need His help. With His help let's look at some of the reasons for conflict in our lives, why they happen and five responses to conflict that come out of the selfish desires we have.

1. My way.

That's when you say "When I face conflict, I'm going to get my way. I'm 100% right, 100% of the time. I'm going to fight. I'm going to do whatever it takes, whatever battle I have to go through to make sure I get what I want." Many of you, that's how you respond to conflict.

2. No way.

When conflict comes into your life, you just start to back off. "I don't want to face this conflict." You'll do anything and everything you can to make sure that the argument doesn't happen. Some of you think you don't have any conflict because this is the way you handle it. You still have conflict. You're just ignoring the problem. You're withdrawing and backing away. Your rule is to avoid conflict at all costs. But you still have it, you still face it. Eventually, the result of this is that nothing is ever resolved and eventually it will catch up with you.

3. Your way.

Whenever we face a conflict we just say, "Have it your way", "I'll always give in to you", "I want your approval", or "I hate conflict." You sort of roll over and play dead. Whatever they want, they get. If you use this method in dealing with conflict, what's happening is within you there is a swell of bitterness growing day by day. It can grow for days and months and years. But eventually it's going to explode. You cannot handle conflict and resolve it this way.

4. Half way.

"Ok, you've got your idea, I've got my idea, let's compromise. You win some of the time, I win some of the time. We'll try to meet half way. Win some/lose some." This is better than the first three but it's still not the best way to deal with conflict.

5. Our way.

We recognize that I have needs and you have needs and there is a way for us to talk together so that our needs can be met in ways they never could have been met before. Instead of just taking half and half, we try to put our whole together and find something better that we could have ever found before. You could also call this God's Way. God taught us through Jesus Christ how to care about another person's needs and how to care about a relationship enough that I'm just not trying to get my way and meet half way, but we work on it together.

We're going to talk today how we can head towards this last way of dealing with relationships.

III. HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

What are the practical steps that the Bible speaks about that help us to resolve the conflicts in our lives? Some of you, when you have conflict in your home, it's like a war zone. Some of you, it's more like a stage and you're actors on a stage -- always playing the same parts again and again. Some of you it's like a courtroom -- stating your points, it's all real controlled.

Today, as we take a look at these principles I want to help you lay down the weapons, take off the masks, lay aside all the legalities that may be a part of your relationship and define a new way to deal with conflict that helps those conflicts to be resolved, helps God's peace and love become part of your life.

1. Become a believer.

Commit your life to Jesus Christ. Begin by resolving your conflict with God. The Bible says that before we come to Jesus Christ we're in conflict with God. You may feel it or not feel it but it says we're in conflict with God. We have our way and we're going to do it our way, even though He has a different way. We're separate from Him. We're without Him in the world. We're in conflict within. Jesus Christ came to this world to make peace between man and God, to solve that conflict. This is the key place to begin in resolving conflict in all of our relationships.

Ephesians 2:16

"As parts of the same body, our anger against each other has disappeared. For both of us have been reconciled to God and so the feud ended at the cross."

He's talking about conflict between nations but this works between people too. The feud ended at the cross. God's able to solve the conflicts in our lives. Many marriage conflicts could be solved overnight, if both husband and wife would come to know Christ because of the power that He has to solve those conflicts we face in our lives.

For me, this is the most everyday advice I could give you. In my marriage, my relationship to Jesus Christ more than anything else sets the tone for the ability to handle the conflicts that we face. It's the same for all of my close relationships with people. He gives me the ability to think in a different way and relate in a different way. Finding the love of Christ helped me find the forgiveness in my life that built the foundation of strength for all of my relationships. Finding the love of Christ also gives me the strength to forgive others. If you're going to solve conflicts you've got to have that strength.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to a young couple who had been married a brief time some advice for their marriage, "Live together in forgiveness for without it no human relationship, least of all a marriage, can survive. Accept each other as you are and forgive each other every day from the bottom of your hearts." That's good advice, advice made more powerful from the fact that he wrote it from a German prisoner of war camp, where just a few years later he died. He talked about forgiveness and the power of forgiveness in relationships to make a difference.

If you want to resolve your relationships, begin your relationship with Jesus Christ. Then He'll give you the strength to move on to the second point.

2. Talk to God about the conflict.

Pray. Before you talk to the other person about it, talk to God about it. In fact, that may resolve it right there! You may find it's mostly your problem anyway.

We all need to learn to ventilate vertically. We're real good at ventilating horizontally at all the people around us. But before you do that, ventilate vertically. David was very good at this. When you read the book of Psalms, he did a lot of this. He told God when he was ticked off! He told Him everything he was feeling. Then he would go and talk to others about it. If you and I could do that, we could solve many of those problems with Him. Talk to God about the problem.

Have you ever been in the middle of an argument and thought "What am I going to do? How are we going to solve this? I don't see how we can break through this." James 1:5 talks about God's ability to make a difference in the way we talk about our problems. When I have a problem I can ask Him to help me solve it.

James 1:5

"If you want to know what God wants you to do ask Him and He will gladly tell you."

God wants to help us. We just need to talk to Him about the problems that we're facing in our lives.

As you talk to God about the problems you're facing, you may discover that the problem you're facing is a need that He needs to be meeting anyway. A hint about a reason we face many of the conflicts we face in our lives: Many of the times we're facing a conflict with somebody we're married to, the reason that conflict is there is we're expecting of them something they just can't give. Oftentimes, we expect other people to meet needs in our lives that only God can meet. He's the only one.

Ruth Graham, Billy Graham's wife, wrote, "I pity the married couple who expect too much from one another. It's foolish to expect from one another that which Jesus Christ can be -- always ready to forgive, totally understanding, unendingly patient, invariably tender and loving, unflinching in every area, anticipating every need, making more than adequate provision. Such expectations put a marriage under an impossible strain." Talking to God about the problem sometimes can help you see that.

There are couple of myths about relationships, about marriage that we live with. We need to understand that these are myths. One of them is, "If I could just get married, all of my needs would be met." That's a myth. It doesn't work. There's no person who can meet all your needs.

To show that this is a myth, right after you get married, the second myth comes up: "If I had just married the right person all of my needs would have been met."

The reason we need Jesus Christ is we can't meet all of one another's needs. Prayer sometimes helps you to recognize that.

There's a warning light to this those times in our lives when we're asking others to meet needs that only do can meet. The warning light is anger. When you find yourself constantly angry with another person, ask yourself, "Am I asking them to do things that only God can do? Am I asking a human being to be God?"

3. Change your focus.

What are you focusing on? Change your focus from my needs to their needs.

Philippians 2:3-5

"Don't be selfish. Don't just think about your own affairs but be interested in others' too, in what they are doing. Your attitude should be the kind that was shown us by Jesus Christ."

The word "scopos" talking about caring from other people's needs -- microscope, telescope -- focus in on the needs that they have in their lives.

Let's get honest. When you get angry, when you're in the middle of a conflict, you're preoccupied with yourself, aren't you? What are my needs and how am I going to get these needs met? I've found that if somehow God gets it into my little brain, just five seconds of the thought, "Think about her needs" and I can take just a moment to do that, it changes the entire complexion of the argument. Christ can give us the strength to do that. He's the one who gives us the power to change our focus. We need to seek to understand not just to be understood.

Jesus talked about the importance of this once in...

Matthew 7:3. He gave us a picture of how important this is.

"Why do you notice the little piece of dust in your friend's eye, but you don't notice the big piece of wood in your own eye. First, take the wood out of your own eye and then you will clearly see to take the dust out of your friend's eye."

Have you ever got involved in one of those arguments where you're pointing out the wood in each other's eye? It doesn't work. It just escalates the argument. Jesus is saying before you even begin, first ask yourself, "Am I at fault at all here?" Even if it's a little speck in your eye it's going to create a blind spot.

I know that most of the time in your conflicts the amount of wrong is maybe 1 hundredth of 1 percent. The other person is mostly wrong. But even if that's true, Jesus is saying here that the tiniest speck of wrong is going to blind you to their needs. All you're going to see is your problem. Ask yourself first, Maybe is this my problem? Do I have a problem here? We all have blind spots. None of us are perfect. Ask yourself if you're being unrealistic. Am I being oversensitive? Am I being too demanding? Am I being insensitive or ungrateful? Our blind spots keep us from seeing their needs.

Ask yourself first, "Do I have a fault here? Is this my problem?" Even if you think, "No, it's not. I've searched this out and in this case it's 100% their fault. It's his/her problem." In marriage it's never his/her problem. It's always our problem. When you became married you became tied together. It's one to work on together.

Change your focus from what's my need to what's their need.

One of the most powerful peacemakers in a relationship can be just some simple words. They can change a conflict. "I'm sorry. . . I was only thinking of myself. . . Help me to see things as you do." If you can genuinely say that within any conflict that has the power to make peace.

There's a fourth key to solving the conflict in our lives. Even when you set down to begin to talk about a conflict it can sometimes escalate out of control. You're thinking, "I just wanted to talk for a few minutes and all of a sudden . . . We started one place and ended another place. What happened?"

4. ESTABLISH GROUND RULES

Even countries make arms treaties with one another. They get together in a battle, a war. The worst of enemies say, there are certain weapons that are out of bounds. Certain weapons we won't use. They know that those weapons, if used, would destroy both sides. There are certain things in communication that are out of bounds. They destroy both sides.

Ephesians 4:31

"Stop being men, bad tempered and angry, quarreling, harsh words and the dislike of others should have no place in our lives."

If you look closely at this verse it helps us to recognize that these ground rules are based on the one characteristic God wants us to have in our lives.

Instead of being mean, be kind. Instead of being bad tempered, be patient.
Instead of anger, try honesty and love. Instead of harsh words, use gentle words.

I know this is where we all live in the struggle. Practical idea: When I talk about being honest, what does that mean? Honesty means several things. When you're honest and you're in the middle of an argument and you're wrong, you admit it. That's part of honesty. Have you ever gotten involved in one of those arguments and about half way through, you realize there might be a possibility you were wrong? Do you admit you're wrong? No, we sometimes escalate things. Ogden Nash: "To keep your marriage brimming in the loving cup, when you're wrong admit it, and when you're right, shut up." Admit when you're wrong.

Never say "never" or "always" in the middle of a conflict. I know we think that strengthens our argument. "You never do..." or "You always..." but it always weakens our argument. When we say never, they're remembering the one time, twelve years ago. Then you start arguing about twelve years ago, whether they did that or not. Don't use those words. It's not honest.

Honesty means say what you mean. We get involved in these arguments where someone says, "You know what I'm talking about. If you loved me you'd know what I'm talking about." Just be honest.

An author, writing a wealthy woman's genealogy, found out that one of her grandfathers had been executed in the electric chair at Sing Sing prison. She didn't want that in there. He applied a little creative communication and wrote instead, "One of her grandfathers occupied the chair of applied electricity in one of America's best known institutions." We can twist words where they don't mean anything. Be honest, say what you mean.

If you're mad about your wife's lack of attention, don't complain about her cooking. If you're angry because your boss has overlooked you, don't complain behind his back about his lack of education. Say what you mean. That's one of the rules we break the most often in communication.

One more idea. Kindness. I'm talking about a character of kindness. How does that work in a practical way? If I'm going to be kind, one of ground rules is, I attack the problem and not the person. Sometimes when you know you're losing an argument you start bringing in the big artillery. The old things. The in-laws. Attack the problem and not the person.

Illus: LUCY

Lucy said in *Peanuts* cartoon when she was talking about this, "If I can't be right, I'm going to be wrong at the top of my lungs." Sometimes we do that. We start to attack more and more.

Illus: Old Proverb that says, "When you throw mud you lose ground."

As a Leadership Team at Eastgate, we have a set of ground rules that we endeavour to live by, which will work for you and all of your relationship as well.

We have a covenant agreement: (which is our promise to each other)

COVENANT AGREEMENT

That we will walk in...

- Humility
- Unconditional Love
- Pre-forgiveness
- 100% Truth

If you'll do these four things dealing with conflict in your relationships, you can't go wrong.

5. GO AND MAKE PEACE.

If you're going to resolve a conflict the key point is go and make peace.

Matthew 5:23-24

"So when you offer your gift to God at the altar and you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go and make peace with that person and then come and offer your gift."

Conflict is not resolved accidentally. It has to be deliberately dealt with. Go and make peace, not just be willing to wait until they come and make peace with you, but you go and make peace. Not go and make excuses or go and make your point. Go and make peace. Jesus shows us that the only way to resolve a conflict is to face a conflict. That's tough but that's the way to get resolved.

In these verses, Jesus says that resolving the conflict is even more important than church. If you're in church giving an offering in church and you remember that somebody has something against you, go and resolve that conflict. Notice he did say, leave your offering and go!

The point is, Jesus said you can't worship God when you have a conflict with others. You can't. It's vital to solve that.

Have any of you ever had a fight in the car on the way to church? Many of us do. Butch and I have our times. We can all get pretty stressed out just trying to get to church; thus the fights come.

Go and make peace. Choose the right time. Choose the right place. And go and make peace.

The right time is as soon as possible. That means after the adrenalin has gone down -- you don't want to go so quick that adrenalin surge is still there. That can be dangerous. But before the bitterness has had a chance to come up, Ephesians 4, Paul talks about don't let the sun go down on your anger. That says to me if you wait more than 24 hours to resolve conflicts, maybe something's wrong. Do as immediately as possible.

Do it in the right place. A place where you can be alone, a place where you can focus in on it, without the kids around for a few minutes. Don't try to resolve conflicts in bed, the last thing at night when you're both tired. It's bad when you're trying to resolve a conflict and you hear the other person start snoring. Find the right time and place. For Butch and I, if we're in bed and it's late, we turn on the lights, wake up and deal with it with all of our faculties in place.

Some of you, there's a conflict you've been struggling with a long time in your life. As a result of today's message what you're going to need to do is go and schedule a peace conference with somebody. It's not going to come easily. You're going to have to schedule a time, block out some time. That's your homework from this message today. Whether it's with a parent, a kid, your husband, your wife -- schedule that peace conference this week. Go and make peace. Allow God's peace to come into your life.

Some of you are really struggling and hurting at this point.

6. ASK FOR ADVICE

Some of you are stuck and you feel like, "I don't know how to get through this wall." If that's true, it's OK to bring in a third party. It's OK to ask for advice. Talk to God about it, and then find someone, an expert who can help you.

Proverbs 13:10

"Pride leads to arguments. Be humble take advice and become wise."

Advice is the path to wisdom.

In every other area in our lives when we face big problems we're not afraid to get professional help. If we're sick physically we're going to go to a doctor. If I've got a financial problem I can't figure out, I'm going to go to an accountant, a CPA. If I've got some legal problems and I don't know what to do, I'm going to go see a lawyer. If you've got some relationship problems in your marriage, there is nothing wrong with going and seeing a professional marriage counselor -- a Christian marriage counselor, somebody who has the tools to help you see how to be Christ like in your marriage and how to handle conflict. They talk through this with hundreds of people. They know what you're facing. Be humble. Take advice. Become wise.

A question we all from time to time have to face in our lives is, "Would I rather have a satisfying marriage or just pretend that I do?" You don't have to pretend. There are people who can help.

Whenever we talk about counseling we think, "What will other people think if they find out about this?" Who cares what other people think? I'm much more interested in your happiness and your joy than what other people think. The fact is other people are probably going to look at you and say, "There's a person of courage, of strength, who had the humility and character to take advice from somebody else and to become wise. I wish I were more like them."

I know sometimes the conflict in relationships can become so painful we just start looking for a way out. It is more rewarding to resolve a conflict than to dissolve a relationship. Much more rewarding. I long for the reward of that joy in your life. Don't walk out. Reach out for help. Take advice. Don't give up, but look up to God for help. Find His strength.

And when you do.... You watch... You wait.... You'll see!

Conclusion:

These that we looked at today are six proven principles on resolving conflict in relationships. From the simplest little conflict to a conflict you may have been facing for years. Use them in your life.

Take a look at these six principles. I'd like to put alongside of them three resolutions for solving conflict. Three commitments you can make in your life.

1. I resolve to commit my life to Jesus Christ. You may have never done that. That is the first point we talked about. That's where you start. Tell Him you need Him. We believe in God and we all need Jesus. I need Jesus Christ in my relationships. I'm not afraid to admit that. That's why He came for us, that's why He loves us. Ask for His help. Ask Him to forgive you for the wrongs you've done and give you direction for everyday life. He's promised He will.

2. I resolve to commit my attitudes to Jesus Christ. You may have given your life to Christ but your attitudes have been crummy lately. They've been yours, a lot of "my way" stuff. He can help you. If you commit your attitudes to Him, He's an expert at the needs of others. He can teach you how. Day by day. Moment by moment.

3. I resolve to commit my words to Jesus Christ, the way I talk to others. To let Him help me begin to talk in a more gentle way, in a more clear way and a more loving way or maybe just to begin to talk at all. Ask for His help in that.

I don't know which one of these resolutions hits home with you but whichever one -- don't try to do all of them, just pick the one that fits with you and begin to live that out this week.

Prayer:

Some of you, as we pray, need to tell Jesus Christ today, "I'm committing my life to You, Jesus." Tell Him that in your heart. You don't even have to say it out loud. He can hear you as you talk in your mind. Tell Him that you need His forgiveness, His direction, the life He can give you. It's OK to tell Him you don't understand everything. I sure didn't when I became a believer. Ask for His help and His strength. Some of you need to say, "Lord, my attitude has been rotten lately and I'm committing my attitude anew and afresh to You today. I've been trying to get my needs met by selfishness and it's not working and now I see why. Help me to try Your way." Some of you just need to talk to God about your words and tell Him, "I haven't been pleased with the way I've been talking to others lately. Would You help me speak in the way You would speak with words that build people up rather than tear people down."

Jesus, we come to You together and ask for Your strength. We pray that You'd help us make these principles from Your word not just something we heard on Sunday, but something we're able to make a living and real part of our lives on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday. I pray that some of the simplest conflicts would be dissolved as they come up this next week because we've looked at Your

word today. I pray that some long lasting conflicts in some lives would be resolved because of the strength of Your word today. I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.