

# IN CONFLICT: GLORIFY GOD

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Conflict is inevitable, where people are involved.

Conflict may be defined as “any opinion or purpose that frustrates my goals or desires.”

There are three possible types of responses to conflict:

1. Peace-Faking

Various kinds of escape, such as denial, running away, or (the ultimate escape) suicide.  
In Peace-Faking I am focused on ME.

2. Peace-Breaking

Types of attack, such as physical or emotional assault, filing a lawsuit, or (the ultimate attack) murder.  
In Peace-Breaking I am focused on YOU.

3. Peace-Making

Peacemaking, however, focuses on US. Peacemaking is about mending fences, reuniting aggrieved people, and healing emotional wounds. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

Peacemaking recognizes that we actually need one another for spiritual and emotional growth and that we are better together than we are apart.

God has placed every member in the body of Christ “as it pleased Him.” He is pleased with you and He is pleased with me. If we remain at odds with each other, He is not pleased with our behavior, but He is still “for us.” This is especially true in the process of peacemaking.

The more you recognize God’s love and power, the easier it is to trust Him. And the more you trust Him, the easier it is to do his will. This is especially true when you are involved in conflict.

*Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!*

## **Sovereign God**

The Bible provides many examples of people who trusted God, even in the midst of terrible hardship and suffering.

Jesus, in Gethsemane’s garden of surrender and betrayal, and on the cross of sacrifice. Paul, in prison repeatedly for preaching the Gospel.

They knew that God was in complete and ultimate control of everything that happened in their lives. This is what is called “the sovereignty of God.”

To be sovereign means to be supreme, unlimited, and completely independent of an other influence. God’s sovereignty extends over all that He has created (Colossians 1:16-17), over all human governments (Proverbs 21:1), and over all individual lives (Romans 9:15-16). He even watches over events that appear insignificant, like a sparrow’s fall to the ground (Matthew 10:29). And all of this, not from a distance, but from a personal interest in every individual person.

## **Pain and Injustice**

God's sovereignty is so complete that He exercises ultimate control even over painful and unjust events.

Certainly, God takes no pleasure in what is hurtful or unjust, and He is never the author of sin. Yet, for His eternal purposes and from the wisdom of His eternal vantage point, He sometimes chooses not to restrain, although He could, and allows sin and suffering and injustice.

Consider Peter's description of the trial and execution of Jesus: *"People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him."* (Acts 2:22-23)

Jesus did not die because God had lost control or looked away. God chose not to restrain the actions of evil men so that His plan of salvation could be effected through the death and resurrection of His Son.

Even when sinful and painful things are happening, God is somehow exercising ultimate control and working all things together for His good purposes (Romans 8:28). And ultimately, at the time God deems right, He administers justice and rights all wrongs.

## **Trusted with Responsibility**

God's sovereignty does not release us from our personal responsibility for our actions. He allows us to exercise immediate control of ourselves and will hold us fully accountable for the decisions we make. There is no excuse for sin. Rather, knowing that He personally tailors events and lovingly looks out for us at every moment should inspire our confident obedience in the midst of conflict.

God is not only great, He is also good!

*Psalms 62:11* God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times: Power, O God, belongs to you; <sup>12</sup> *unfailing love, O Lord, is yours.*

Power *and* unfailing love are His! God is for you! And He never takes His eyes off you. That does not mean He insulates us from all suffering, for He often uses difficulty in our lives to display His power, faithfulness, and goodness, and thus, to bring glory to Himself.

## **Growing Through Pain**

By the things that we suffer, God teaches us to rely on Him more and develops our spiritual character. He will always provide the spiritual strength we need to face our difficulties.

*1 Corinthians 10:13* *The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.*

Furthermore, he uses our trials to teach us how to minister to others during their trials.

*2 Corinthians 1:3* All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. <sup>4</sup> He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. <sup>5</sup> For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ.

We may not recognize His purposes in the circumstances of our lives. Perhaps at some later time, but perhaps it will remain a mystery for as long as we live; some of God's wisdom is simply too profound for us to grasp. Nevertheless, we may *trust* His wisdom and *follow* His lead.

## Practicing Trust

God may not tell us everything we *want* to know, but He has told us everything we *need* to know. Rather than straining to *figure out* God's plan, we should concentrate on *putting into practice* the promises and instructions found in the Scriptures.

We will have our questions, doubts, and fears—as have all those who have gone before us; those are natural. Trusting God means drawing on His grace and trusting in His love *in spite* of our questions, doubts, and fears.

I could point to the lives of Joseph or David or Peter or Paul, or modern heroes of faith, like Jim and Elizabeth Elliott or Joni Eareckson Tada who all have demonstrated both the human struggle and the spiritual choice to *trust God* that is characteristic of those who follow Jesus' lead.

If you do not believe that God is *both* sovereign and good, you will have difficulty trusting Him. If God is in control but is not loving, we would not *want* to trust Him. But if He is loving, but not in control, for what *could* we trust Him?

When you are involved in conflict, you must decide whether or not you will trust God. If you believe that God is sovereign and that He will never allow anything into your life unless it can be used for good, you will begin to see conflicts not as *accidents*, but as *opportunities*.

## You Can Do It

Every time you encounter conflict, you will inevitably show what you really think of God—not what you profess to believe, but what you *actually* believe—by your response.

The Bible teaches us to see conflict in a new way—neither as an inconvenience nor as an occasion to force our will on others—as an opportunity to demonstrate the love and power of God in our lives.

The Apostle Paul's philosophy of ministry was this:

*1 Corinthians 10:33* I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved.

If you do not intentionally glorify God when you are involved in a conflict, you will inevitably glorify someone or something else. By your actions, you will show either that you have a big God or that you have a big self and big problems. If you don't focus on God, you will focus on yourself and your will or on other people and the threat of their wills.

## How to Glorify God

To glorify God is to bring Him praise and honor by showing who He is, what He is like, and what He is doing.

The best way to glorify God in the midst of conflict is to depend on and draw attention to His grace—the undeserved love, mercy, forgiveness, strength, and wisdom He gives to us through Jesus Christ. You can do this in four ways:

### 1. Trust God

Instead of relying on your own ideas and abilities as you respond to people who oppose you, ask God to give you grace to depend on Him and follow His ways, even if they're completely opposite to what you feel like doing.

*Proverbs 3:5* Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. <sup>6</sup> Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. <sup>7</sup> Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

Remember how Jesus has freed you through the Good News of His saving love. Trust that Jesus forgives all your sins and confess them freely (1 John 1:9). Believe that He is using the pressures of conflict to help you grow, and cooperate with Him (Romans 8:28). Depend on His assurance that He is always watching over you, and stop fearing what others might do to you (Hebrews 13:5-6). Know that He delights to display His transforming power in your life, and attempt to do things that you could never accomplish in your own strength, such as forgiving someone who has hurt you deeply. By such "unnatural" actions, people may see that God is real and praise Him for His work in your life.

### 2. Obey God

God is glorified when you do what He commands.

*Matthew 5:16* Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Obeying God's commands without compromise honors Him and demonstrates that He is worthy of our deepest love and devotion (John 14:15).

### 3. Imitate God

When the believers in Ephesus were struggling with conflict, the Apostle Paul advised them:

*Ephesians 5:1* Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. <sup>2</sup> Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

Imitating Jesus in the midst of conflict is the surest way to restore peace and unity with those who oppose us (1 John 2:6).

When we mirror Jesus' humility, mercy, forgiveness, and loving correction, we surprise the world and give concrete evidence of the Lord's presence and power in our lives.

#### **4. Acknowledge God**

As God gives you grace to respond to conflict in the unusual and effective ways I've described, people will take notice and want to know how you do it—how you control your emotions, how you remain patient and kind, how you show respect for those who oppose you. This is your opportunity to glorify God directly by telling them that you could never do these things on your own and that God is helping you. Then you can tell them the Good News that what Jesus has done for you He will also do for them.

If you want to show that you love God “*with your whole heart and your whole soul and your whole mind*” (Matthew 22:37), then ask Him to help you to trust, obey, imitate, and acknowledge Him, especially when it is difficult to do so. That is how you honor Him!

#### **To Your Benefit**

You stand to benefit, when you glorify God in the midst of conflict. Many disputes begin, or grow worse, because someone gives in to their emotions and says or does something they later regret. You'll be much less likely to stumble in those ways when you focus on trusting, obeying, imitating, and acknowledging God.

Also, a God-centered approach to resolving conflict makes you less dependent on the results. Even if others do not respond positively to your efforts to make peace, you may take comfort in the knowledge that God was pleased with *your* obedience. This knowledge has helped me to persevere in difficult situations until resolution was reached.

The question to ask yourself is this: How can I please and honor God in this situation? Specifically, how can I bring praise to Jesus by showing that He has saved me and is changing me?