

IN CONFLICT: GO AND BE RECONCILED

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Jesus said, "In the world you will have conflict."

Now, the word He actually used was broader than that, but it certainly included conflict. Conflict is inevitable, wherever people are concerned. Therefore, it is vital that you be well-prepared to meet it, so that you will not be overcome by it.

To complete Jesus' thought: "In the world you will have conflict, but be courageous, for I have overcome the world."

Whether we are proud or humble, intimidated or courageous, self-preserving or self-sacrificing in the face of conflict determines our loss or gain and how much glory God receives from our experience.

There are three possible types of responses to conflict:

1. Peace-Faking (Denying)
2. Peace-Breaking (Attacking)
3. Peace-Making (Restoring)

Peacemaking focuses on restoring relationships—with God, first, and with one another, second.

In conflict, let your first aim be to glorify God, your second aim be to get the log out of your own eye, and your third aim be to help your brother get the speck out of his eye. Finally, work at reconciling with your brother or sister.

Matthew 5:23 So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, ²⁴ leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. (NLT)

Reconciliation means to replace hostility and separation with peace and friendship. Conflict will always involve personal offenses. Sometimes, it also involves material issues.

Personal offenses must be laid to rest thru confession and forgiveness. Material issues must be resolved by negotiating an agreement.

Sometimes, material issues must be substantially resolved before forgiveness can occur. Other times, forgiveness must precede and pave the way for negotiation.

Forgive as God Forgave You

Colossians 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (NIV)

Christians are the most forgiven people in the world. Therefore, we should be the most forgiving people in the world. As we know from experience, however, it is often difficult to genuinely and completely forgive a person who has injured us.

Haven't you heard someone say, "I forgive him, I just don't want anything to do with him again"? Have you ever felt that way about someone?

Didn't Jesus teach us to specifically pray: "*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*" (Matthew 6:12)?

How would you feel if you confessed a sin to the Lord and then heard Him say, "I forgive you—I just don't want to have anything to do with you again"? Would you feel forgiven? Most people would not.

We cannot overlook the direct relationship between God's forgiveness and our forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (NIV)

This is certainly a high standard, but fortunately, God gives us the grace and guidance we need to imitate Him in this regard.

Forgiveness Is Not

Forgiveness is not a feeling, it is an act of your *will*.

Forgiveness is not forgetting (a *passive* process), it is an *active* process of choice and deliberate course of action

Forgiveness is not excusing (as in "It was nothing"); when I forgive I am acknowledging wrong, but since God forgave me, I forgive you.

A woman went to her pastor for advice on improving her marriage. When he asked what her greatest complaint was, she replied, "Every time we get into a fight, my husband gets historical."

"You must mean *hysterical*," he interjected.

"No," she said, I meant exactly what I said. He keeps a mental record of everything I've done wrong, and whenever he gets mad, I get a history lesson."

Forgiveness is not keeping a record of wrongs.

Jeremiah 31:34 I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (ESV)

Psalms 130:3 Lord, if you kept a record of our sins, who, O Lord, could ever survive? ⁴ But you offer forgiveness, that we might learn to fear you. (NLT)

1 Corinthians 13:5 Love...keeps no record of being wronged.(NLT)

Forgiveness Is

Forgiveness means releasing someone from liability to suffer punishment or penalty for their wrongs. Two Greek words are used to describe this grace in the New Testament. The first (*aphiemi*) means that a debt has been paid or cancelled in full. The second (*charizomai*) means a favor has been bestowed freely or unconditionally.

This is precisely what Jesus accomplished for us through His death on the cross.

Isaiah 53:4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like

sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (NIV)

Forgiveness grants the same release that God promised us:

Isaiah 59:2 Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. (ESV)

Forgiveness makes *four promises*:

- “I will not think about this incident.”
- “I will not bring up this incident again to use it against you.”
- “I will not talk to others about this incident.”
- “I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.”

Forgiveness As Process

You may need to approach forgiveness as a two-stage process.

The first stage may be called *positional* forgiveness (an unconditional commitment to God of the first promise to forgive).

The second stage may be called *transactional* forgiveness (conditional on the repentance of the offender, it includes the other three promises to forgive).

Christ died on the cross, taking the *position* of forgiveness, maintaining an attitude of love and mercy toward those who were responsible for His death. The *transaction* is completed when individuals repent of their sin (as on the Day of Pentecost).

There Are Always Consequences

Forgiveness does not release a wrongdoer from all consequences of sin. It immediately removes the penalty of *separation*, but some consequences may be used by God to teach us or others not to sin again.

What If I Cannot Forgive?

Unforgiveness is not an option for a follower of Jesus. God offers three helpers to overcome unforgiveness: the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and pastors and fellow Christians.

Corrie Ten Boom relates her experience at meeting one of her persecutors for the first time after the war. He had become a believer and rejoiced in the forgiveness of Christ, but Ten Boom could not bring herself to shake his hand or express even the least warmth toward this brother.

Finally, she confessed silently to God her inability to forgive him and asked God to give her *His* forgiveness for the man.

She reports: “So I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on Him. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

Moving to Reconciliation

After demolishing an obstruction, you usually have to clear away some debris and make some repairs—this is what we call reconciliation; a change of attitude that leads to a change in the relationship.

Reconciliation is clearly a process, not a single act, in which you give a repentant individual opportunity to demonstrate their repentance and rebuild your trust. While you may proceed with some caution, you should not demand guarantees; stumbling may be part of the process of repair. The process continues until your relationship has been fully restored.

You must pursue reconciliation in three arenas:

- In thought (Philippians 4:8 Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.)
- In word (Ephesians 4:29 Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.)
- In deed (1 John 3:18 Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.)

PAUSE to Negotiate

If there are material issues involved in a conflict, negotiation will be necessary to settle the matter. The world trains us to approach negotiation in a competitive manner—preparing your arguments, minimizing your opponent's credibility, taking advantage of his weaknesses, getting the most you can.

Ken Sande, author of The Peacemaker, encourages cooperative negotiation instead, which focuses on glorifying God, serving others and personal spiritual growth. He recommends, "When you need to negotiate, PAUSE:"

Prepare yourself

Affirm relationships, don't just focus on the problems

Understand interests (what motivates people)

Search for creative solutions (brainstorming options)

Evaluate options objectively and reasonably

When Peacemaking Breaks Down

If someone is resistant to your efforts to make peace, you may be inclined to write them off, or pay them back in kind. The Bible supports neither response. However difficult a Christian brother or sister may make themselves here and now, they will become our transformed neighbors on the other side. We should do our best to live at peace with them here.

Luke 6:27 But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you.

²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.

If we have not pursued such responses, we have not begun to seek peace or pursue it.

These five principles will turn your responses into an effective offensive tactic:

- Control your tongue (lest you enflame)
- Seek godly advisors (lest you abandon God's ways)
- Keep doing what is right (people are watching)
- Recognize your limits (you cannot force resolution)
- Use the ultimate weapon (deliberate, focused love)

Courage for the Journey

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! ¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord. ²⁰ Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads." ²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

The principles described by Paul above are applicable at every stage of a conflict and its resolution—and they are echoed throughout the Bible:

- Love your neighbor as yourself
- Do to others what you would have them do to you
- Overlook an offense
- If someone is caught in a sin, restore him gently
- Speak the truth in love
- Look out for the interests of others
- Forgive as the Lord forgave you
- Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good

Peacemaking is not a passive process; it requires courage and faithfulness.

Matthew 5:24 Leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

A peacemaker is a person who goes.