



PeaceWise

building peacemakers for life

PEACEMAKING PRINCIPLES

The Bible provides us with a simple yet powerful system for resolving conflict.

These principles are so simple that they can be used to resolve the most basic conflicts of daily life. But they are so powerful that they have been used to address church divisions, breakdowns in school and tertiary college working relationships, ministry team breakups, divorce and child custody actions, embezzlement situations, multi-million dollar business disputes and negligence lawsuits. These principles are briefly discussed below.

1. See conflict as an opportunity

Conflict is not necessarily bad or destructive. Even when conflict is caused by sin and causes a great deal of stress, God can use it for good (see Rom. 8:28-29). As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, conflict actually provides three significant opportunities. By God's grace, you can use conflict to:

- Glorify God (by trusting, obeying, and imitating him)
- Serve other people (by helping to bear their burdens or by confronting them in love)
- Grow to be like Christ (by confessing sin and turning from attitudes that promote conflict).

These concepts are totally overlooked in most conflicts because people naturally focus on escaping from the situation or overcoming their opponent. Therefore, it is wise to periodically step back from a conflict and ask yourself whether you are doing all that you can to take advantage of these special opportunities.

2. God: glorify God

We start by inviting God into the conflict - seeking his help and to see things as he would want us to.

When the Apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to live “to the glory of God,” he was not talking about one hour on Sunday morning. He wanted them to show God honour and bring him praise in day-to-day life, especially by the way that they resolved personal conflicts (see 1 Cor. 10:31). As mentioned above, you can glorify God in the midst of conflict by trusting him, obeying him, and imitating him (see Prov. 3:4-6; John 14:15; Eph. 5:1).

One of the best ways to keep these concerns uppermost in your mind is to regularly ask yourself this focusing question: “How can I please and honour the Lord in this situation?”

3. Me: get the log out of your own eye

After starting with God, next we consider ourselves - our contribution to the conflict.

One of the most challenging principles of peacemaking is set forth in Matthew 7:5, where Jesus says, "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

There are generally two kinds of "logs" you need to look for when dealing with conflict. First, you need to ask whether you have had a critical, negative, or overly sensitive attitude that has led to unnecessary conflict. One of the best ways to do this is to spend some time meditating on Philippians 4:2-9, which describes the kind of attitude Christians should have even when they are involved in a conflict. The second kind of log you must deal with is actual sinful words and actions. Because you are often blind to your own sins, you may need an honest friend or advisor who will help you to take an objective look at yourself and face up to your contribution to a conflict.

When you identify ways that you have wronged another person, it is important to admit your wrongs honestly and thoroughly. One way to do this is to use the "Seven A's of Apology and Confession:"

- Address everyone involved (Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:8-9)
- Avoid if, but, and maybe (don't make excuses; Luke 15:11-24)
- Admit specifically (both attitudes and actions)
- Apologize (express sorrow for the way you affected someone)
- Accept the consequences (Luke 19:1-9)
- Alter your behaviour (commit to changing harmful habits; Eph. 4:22-32)
- Ask for forgiveness

The most important aspect of getting the log out of your own eye is to go beyond the confession of wrong behaviour and face up to the root cause of that behaviour. The Bible teaches that conflict comes from the desires that battle in your heart (James 4:1-3; Matt. 15:18-19). Some of these desires are obviously sinful, such as wanting to conceal the truth, bend others to your will, or have revenge. In many situations, however, conflict is fueled by good desires that you have elevated to sinful demands, such as a craving to be understood, loved, respected, or vindicated.

Any time you become excessively preoccupied with something, even a good thing, and seek to find happiness, security or fulfillment in it rather than in God, you are guilty of idolatry. Idolatry inevitably leads to conflict with God ("You shall have no other gods before me"). It also causes conflict with other people. As James writes, when we want something but don't get it, we kill and covet, quarrel and fight (James 4:1-4).

There are three basic steps you can take to overcome the idolatry that fuels conflict.

- First, you should ask God to help you see where you have been guilty of wrong worship, that is, where you are focusing your love, attention, and energy on something other than God.
- Second, you should specifically identify and renounce each of the desires contributing to the conflict.
- Third, you should deliberately pursue right worship, that is, to fix your heart and mind on God and to seek joy, fulfillment, and satisfaction in him alone.

As God guides and empowers these efforts, you can find freedom from the idols that fuel conflict and be motivated to make choices that will please and honour Christ. This change in heart will usually speed a resolution to a present problem, and at the same time improve your ability to avoid similar conflicts in the future.

4. **You: gently restore**

But we also need to consider "You" - the other person. And how to have that difficult conversation with them to raise the things that have hurt you and which you believe they need to address as well.

Otherwise expressed, we need to make an effort to help others understand how they have contributed to a conflict. Before you decide to confront someone, however, remember that it is appropriate to overlook minor offences (see Prov. 19:11). As a general rule, an offence should be overlooked if you can answer "no" to all of the following questions:

- Is the offence seriously dishonouring God?
- Has it permanently damaged a relationship?
- Is it seriously hurting other people? and
- Is it seriously hurting the offender himself or herself?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, an offence is too serious to overlook, in which case God commands you to go and talk with the offender privately and lovingly about the situation (see Matt. 18:15). As you do so, remember to:

- Pray for humility and wisdom
- Plan your words carefully (think of how you would want to be confronted)
- Anticipate likely reactions and plan appropriate responses (rehearsals can be very helpful)
- Choose the right time and place (talk in person whenever possible)
- Assume the best about the other person until you have facts to prove otherwise (Prov. 11:27)
- Listen carefully (Prov. 18:13)
- Speak only to build others up (Eph. 4:29)
- Ask for feedback from the other person
- Recognise your limits (only God can change people; see Rom. 12:18; 2 Tim. 2:24-26)

If an initial confrontation does not resolve a conflict, do not give up. Review what was said and done, and look for ways to make a better approach during a follow up conversation. It may also be wise to ask a spiritually mature friend for advice on how to approach the other person more effectively. Then try again with even stronger prayer support.

If repeated, careful attempts at a private discussion are not fruitful, and if the matter is still too serious to overlook, you should ask one or two other people to meet with you and your opponent and help you to resolve your differences through mediation, arbitration, or church discipline (see Matt. 18:16-20; 1 Cor. 6:1-8;)

5. Us: go and be reconciled

And this leads us to seeking to navigate to "us" - a restored relationship where the various relational and material issues have been addressed in a God-pleasing way.

One of the most unique features of biblical peacemaking is the pursuit of genuine forgiveness and reconciliation.

Even though Christians have experienced the greatest forgiveness in the world, we often fail to show that forgiveness to others. To cover up our disobedience we often use the shallow statement, "I forgive her—I just don't want to have anything to do with her again." Just think, however, how you would feel if God said to you, "I forgive you; I just don't want to have anything to do with you again"? Praise God that he never says this! Instead, he forgives you totally and opens the way for genuine reconciliation. He calls you to forgive others in exactly the same way: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col. 3:12-14; see also 1 Cor. 13:5; Psalm 103:12; Isa. 43:25).

One way to imitate God's forgiveness is to make four specific promises when you forgive someone:

- I will not think about this incident.
- I will not bring this incident up and 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.

Note that if the conduct in question is something which keeps being repeated even after forgiveness has been extended, then it may become necessary to raise the matter again, not to 'use it against' the person but because the behaviour is still an ongoing issue which is hurting the relationship and therefore still needs to be addressed.

Remember that forgiveness is a spiritual process that you cannot fully accomplish on your own. Therefore, as you seek to forgive others, continually ask God for grace to enable you to imitate his wonderful forgiveness toward you.

6. Negotiate in a biblical manner

Even when you manage to resolve personal offences through confession and forgiveness, you may still need to deal with substantive issues, which may involve money, property, or the exercise of certain rights. These issues should not be swept under the carpet or automatically passed to a higher authority. Instead, they should be negotiated in a biblically faithful manner.

As a general rule, you should try to negotiate substantive issues in a cooperative manner rather than a competitive manner. In other words, instead of aggressively pursuing your own interests and letting others look out for themselves, you should deliberately look for solutions that are beneficial to everyone involved.

As the Apostle Paul put it, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4; see Matt. 22:39; 1 Cor. 13:5; Matt. 7:12).

A biblical approach to negotiation may be summarised in five basic steps, which we refer to as the PAUSE Principle:

- Prepare (pray, get the facts, seek godly counsel, develop options)
- Affirm relationships (show genuine concern and respect for others)
- Understand interests (identify others' concerns, desires, needs, limitations, or fears)
- Search for creative solutions (prayerful brainstorming)
- Evaluate options objectively and reasonably (evaluate, don't argue)

If you have never used this approach to negotiation before, it will take time and practice (and sometimes advice from others) to become proficient at it. But it is well worth the effort, because learning the PAUSE principle will help you not only to resolve your present dispute but also to negotiate more effectively in all areas of your life.

7. Be prepared for unreasonable people

Whenever you are responding to conflict, you need to realize that other people may harden their hearts and refuse to be reconciled to you. There are two ways you can prepare for this possibility.

First, remember that God does not measure success in terms of results but in terms of faithful obedience. He knows that you cannot force other people to act in a certain way. Therefore he will not hold you responsible for their actions or for the ultimate outcome of a conflict. All God expects of you is to obey his revealed will as faithfully as possible (see Rom. 12:18). If you do that, no matter how the conflict turns out, you can walk away with a clear conscience before God, knowing that his appraisal is, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Second, resolve that you will not give up on finding a biblical solution. If a dispute is not easily resolved, you may be tempted to say, "Well, I tried all the biblical principles I know, and they just didn't work. It looks like I'll have to handle this another way (meaning, 'the world's way')."

A Christian should never close the Bible. When you try to resolve a conflict but do not see the results you desire, you should seek God even more earnestly through prayer, the study of his Word, and the counsel of his church. As you do so, it is essential to keep your focus on Christ and all that he has already done for you (see Col. 3:1-4). It is also helpful to follow five principles for overcoming evil, which are described in Romans 12:14-21:

- Control your tongue ("Bless those who curse you;" see also Eph. 4:29)
- Seek godly advisors (identify with others and do not become isolated)
- Keep doing what is right (see 1 Pet. 2:12, 15; 3:15b-16)
- Recognize your limits (instead of retaliating, stay within proper biblical channels)
- Use the ultimate weapon: deliberate, focused love (see also John 3:16; Luke 6:27-31)
- At the very least, these steps will protect you from being consumed by the acid of your own bitterness and resentment if others continue to oppose you. And in some cases, God may eventually use such actions to bring another person to repentance (see 1 Sam. 24:1-22).

Even if other people persist in doing wrong, you can continue to trust that God is in control and will deal with them in his time (see Psalms 10 and 37).

This kind of patience in the face of suffering is commended by God (see 1 Pet. 2:19) and ultimately results in our good and his glory.

8. Get help from above

None of us can make complete and lasting peace with others in our own strength. We must have help from God. But before we can receive that help, we need to be at peace with God himself.

Peace with God does not come automatically, because all of us have sinned and alienated ourselves from him (see Isa. 59:1–2). Instead of living the perfect lives needed to enjoy fellowship with him, each of us has a record stained with sin (see Matt. 5:48; Rom. 3:23). As a result, we deserve to be eternally separated from God (Rom. 6:23a). That is the bad news.

The good news is that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Believing in Jesus means more than being baptised, going to church, or trying to be a good person. None of these activities can erase the sins you have already committed and will continue to commit throughout your life.

Believing in Jesus means, first of all, admitting that you are a sinner and acknowledging that there is no way you can earn God's approval by your own works (Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:8–9). Second, it means believing that Jesus paid the full penalty for your sins when he died on the cross (Isa. 53:1–12; 1 Peter 2:24–25). In other words, believing in Jesus means trusting that he exchanged records with you at Calvary—that is, he took your sinful record on himself and paid for it in full, giving you his perfect record.

When you believe in Jesus and receive his perfect record of righteousness, you can really have true peace with God. As you receive this peace, God will give you an increasing ability to make peace with others by following the peacemaking principles he gives us in Scripture, many of which are described above (see Phil. 4:7; Matt. 5:9).

If you have never confessed your sin to God and believed in Jesus Christ as your Saviour, Lord, and King, you can do so right now by sincerely praying this prayer:

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner, and I realize that my good deeds could never make up for my wrongs. I need your forgiveness. I believe that you died for my sins, and I want to turn away from them. I trust you now to be my Saviour, and I will follow you as my Lord and King, in the fellowship of your church.

If you have prayed this prayer, it is essential that you find fellowship with other Christians in a church where the Bible is faithfully taught and applied. This fellowship will help you to learn more about God, grow in your faith, and obey what he commands, even when you are involved in a difficult conflict.

9. Get help from the Church

As God helps you to practice his peacemaking principles, you will be able to resolve most of the normal conflicts of daily life on your own. Sometimes, however, you will encounter situations that you do not know how to handle.

In such situations, it is appropriate to turn to a spiritually mature person within the church who can give you advice on how you might be able to apply these principles more effectively.

In most cases, such "coaching" will enable you to go back to the other person in the conflict and work out your differences in private. If the person from whom you seek advice does not have much experience in conflict resolution, it may be helpful to give him or her a copy of *Guiding people through conflict*, which provides practical, nuts-and-bolts guidance on how to help other people resolve conflict.

When individual advice does not enable you to resolve a dispute, you should ask one or two mutually respected friends to meet with you and your opponent to help you settle your difference through mediation or arbitration (see Matt. 18:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:1-8). For more information on how to get guidance and assistance in resolving a dispute, click Contact Us in the main menu.

For further assistance, please contact us at PeaceWise on 1300 IPEACE (1300 173223) or email us at enquiry@peacewise.org.au