

The logo for Chapter 3 Ministries features the words "chapter" and "ministries" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The word "chapter" is positioned above "ministries". To the right of the text is a large, stylized number "3" formed by two thick, black, curved lines that overlap to create a three-dimensional effect.

chapter  
ministries

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# Conflict Resolution in Ministry

**Communities need tensions if they are to grow and deepen. Tensions come from conflicts...A tension or difficulty can signal the approach of a new grace of God. But it has to be looked at wisely and humanly.**

*Jean Vanier*

# OUR GOAL

To equip leaders to do effective conflict resolution in their areas of service.

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## KEY VERSES

### **Matthew 7:3-5**

*Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, "let me take the speck out of your eye," while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.*

### **Matthew 18:15-17**

*If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

### **I Corinthians 6:1-8**

*If any of you has a dispute with another dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another -and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.*

# WHY IS CONFLICT RESOLUTION SO IMPORTANT?

1. It is a necessary component of a biblically functioning community.  
*1 Corinthians 6; Matthew 5:23-25; Matthew 18:15*
2. It demonstrates our commitment to unity. Eph. 4:3-6 says "make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace..."
3. It puts to the test whether we trust Jesus to protect us and keep us safe.  
*John 13:34; 14:15 and 17:20-23*
4. It is given biblical priority over public worship. Matthew 5:23-25 says "leave your gift at the altar..." It is better to go and make peace with a neighbor than worship God in the middle of relational brokenness.
5. It focuses us on the real cause of conflict (pride, selfishness, greed or forgiveness) instead of defending our "rights. It gives us a "spiritual character x-ray" and reveals our growth edges.
6. It confirms our own need for forgiveness and reminds us of Jesus' command to forgive others.
7. It provides a positive witness to unbelievers of our Christian commitment to peace and is a significant evangelism tool. Conversely, nothing is more repellant to the cause of Christ than fighting Christians.
8. It preserves relationships and promotes long lasting friendships, marriages etc.
9. Biblical conflict resolution is relatively inexpensive and generally more creative than litigation and has fewer consequences than criminal charges.
10. God says so.

# **HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO CONFLICT?**

# **TEST YOURSELF!**

## **Principle: Go in Private**

**1** \_\_\_\_\_ **10**

I almost always find a way to say my confronting words when I'm alone with the person.

I find verbal jabs with others listening an effective way to get my point across.

## **Principle: Direct Communication**

**1** \_\_\_\_\_ **10**

I tend to use subtle and indirect ways to let someone know they've hurt me.

I've been told that I overwhelm people with my directness.

## **Principle: Acknowledging Conflict**

**1** \_\_\_\_\_ **10**

I avoid or tip-toe around conflict.

I get energized by conflict.

## **Principle: Taking Initiative**

**1** \_\_\_\_\_ **10**

I find it almost impossible to initiate conflict resolution.

I find it necessary to confront every offense big and small.

## **Principle: No Third Parties**

**1** \_\_\_\_\_ **10**

I almost never talk about my conflicts with others until I've directly confronted the person.

I tend to work through my feelings by talking to others without going to the person who hurt me.

## **Principle: Test Yourself**

**1** \_\_\_\_\_ **10**

I have several unresolved conflicts in my life.

I am at peace with others so far as I know.

## Putting into Practice "Step 1" of Matthew 18.

### **First: Note the offense.**

Be honest and admit that you are offended or that you may have offended someone else.

### **Second: Accept responsibility for peacemaking.**

Recognize that you have the responsibility to:

Matthew 5:23-24 says, "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, *if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you*, leave your gift there and before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift."

### **Third: Consider genuinely overlooking the offense.**

Proverbs 19:11 says, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is his glory to overlook an offense."

The test of genuineness:

### **Fourth: Take out the log.**

Honestly examine yourself to discover what you have contributed to the dispute. Identify your own wrong attitudes, actions or words and seek forgiveness for them first.

Psalm 139 reflective exercise - "Lord search *me*, know *me*..."

In Matthew 7:4-5 Jesus said, "Or how can you speak to your neighbor, 'Let me take that speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your

brother's

eye."

**Fifth: Go in private.**

Going directly to the individual in private means:

Deviation from this will trigger:

*(Exceptions to step one can be made in instances of illegal sexual harassment, child abuse etc. These cases should be properly reported and addressed through step two or three of Matthew 18.)*

In all other instances:

**Sixth: Go and show your brother his fault.**

Speaking the truth in love is an art. It requires practice to develop skill.

## **Things you can do to build authentic community in your team in addition to personally practicing Matthew 18 Step 1 principles:**

1. Make a personal commitment to be an authentic person no matter what.
2. Be a clean vessel that God can use for peacemaking. In other words, make sure that as far as you are able, you are at peace in your relational world.
3. *Redirect* and remind others about Matthew 18 principles if necessary. If someone involves you inappropriately in his conflict with another, *stop* him **and** *redirect* him to the person with whom he is having the conflict.
4. *Refuse* to do the hard work of Matthew 18 for someone else. Do not pick up the offense of others! This thwarts the Matthew 18 process and diminishes the positive lessons that conflict resolution can bring to the person you are trying to inappropriately help.
5. *Refuse* to be pulled in to a group that is agitating and promoting conflict. Matthew 18 clearly does **not** permit mob action. Each person is responsible for properly dealing with his own offenses. It is fear that God will not be present, or a desire to win or just plain sin that causes someone to gravitate toward a mob mentality.
6. *Resist* the interloper. Draw firm boundaries around the area of conflict. Only those who have "standing" should be included in the discussions no matter how much pressure you receive to broaden the circle.

## Testing the Waters

### How a Leader Can Evaluate a Matthew 18:15 Step 1 Confrontation:

*"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one."*

**A. Was *INITIATIVE* taken?**

**B. Was the offense *ACKNOWLEDGED*?**

**C. Was there *DIRECT, PRIVATE COMMUNICATION*?**

**D. Was the *COMMUNICATION* Biblically appropriate?**

**E. Was there an appropriate *RESPONSE*?**



## **Mediation Ground Rules:**

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The purpose of these ground rules is to maintain a positive and respectful atmosphere in the midst of tension. It is important to get a verbal commitment from the parties to the ground rules before beginning the mediation. You may also want to begin with a brief devotional. *Some appropriate passages are Philippians 2:1-4; Colossians 3:1-4.*

1. We agree to communicate respectfully.
2. We agree to speak the truth in love.
3. We agree to not interrupt each other.
4. We agree to not discuss this matter with people who do not have a necessary interest in it.
5. Anyone may request a break or caucus, but there will be no disruptive departures.

## **Maintaining Appropriate Control:**

- A. Romans 12:8 says "...lead with diligence."
- B. Behaviors that are not to be tolerated:

***Do not allow an unruly person to take control.***

# How To Deal With Unreasonable People:

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1. Control your tongue ("Bless those who curse you" and Ephesians 4:29)
2. Seek Godly advisors (identify with others and do not become isolated)
3. Keep doing what is right (see also I Peter 2:12,15; 3:15b-16)
4. 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)

## Repentance Excerpts from *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande

He who conceals his sin does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy -Proverbs 28:13. Once there has been the proper identification of "the log in their own eye," there are three next steps: confession, repentance and personal change.

## The Seven (7) Elements of a Confession:

1. Address everyone involved;
2. Avoid if, but and maybe;
3. Admit specifically;
4. Apologize;
5. Accept the consequences;
6. Alter your behavior;
7. Ask for forgiveness and allow time.

**It is important to encourage people that they can in fact change  
and that change can occur through:**

1. Prayer
2. Focus on the Lord
3. Study of God's word and other good materials
4. Practice doing what is right
5. Professional help or spiritual mentoring
6. Accountability

## Reflection Exercise

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* Psalm 139:23-24

"Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there is any wicked way in me." No doubt you've heard those words before, but maybe not in context. In Psalm 139, David was praying and he was filled with worship for his wonderful God. But as he's giving praise, something else happens in his mind. He begins picturing people who are rebellious to God - people whose lifestyles fly in the face of everything a holy God stands for. And so, in the middle of his worship, David cries out, "God, I hate those who hate thee. I hate them with the utmost hatred." He's saying, "I just don't get it. How could any living being refuse to follow a God as wonderful as you?"

And in that moment - like lightning striking on a hot August night - the thought strikes him, "Wait! Here I am thinking about all those people out there that might not be fully submitted to God~ Maybe there is a little pocket of rebellion or resistance in me. Maybe there is a dark little closet somewhere in my soul that is not fully yielded to God." And David can't bear the thought of that. So, with extraordinary courage he says, "Search me, God. Try me. Expose whatever secret exists in me that is not fully surrendered. Bring it out into the light. Expose it so that by Your power and grace it can be touched and put out of my life because I don't want anything in my life to be a deterrent to my full devotion to You." It's a lot easier to ask God to deal with other people than it is to get on your knees and say, "God, deal with me. Deal with me." Have you ever prayed that prayer? Are you willing to pray that prayer? It's a high-risk thing. But it's a prayer we must all pray if we're really serious about growing.

Bill Hybels

Before we proceed further with this reflection exercise, take as much time as you need to sincerely pray a "search me" prayer. For example, "Lord, help me right now to lower my defenses and trust your love. With the help of your Spirit, what do I need to see? Search me..." Consider actually speaking the words of the Psalm. Add your name in several places so it hits home that God wants to personally speak to you, *about* you. When you feel you have genuinely slowed yourself down, lowered your defenses and opened your heart, move on to the following questions.

### **KNOW MY HEART...**

Jesus says our heart follows our treasure (Matthew 6). As you reflect on the past several months during this conflict, what have you been treasuring?

- What good things? (Positive desires, longings, visions, relationships, etc.)
- What, if any, unhealthy things have you been treasuring? (An unhealthy desire for recognition or approval? A position or place of status? A personal ambition? etc.)

According to Jesus, our *words* also reveal our heart. Spend some time reflecting on your words - your communication patterns and tendencies during the past few weeks and months.

- Particularly considering the conflict at hand, what has characterized those words? (Truth? Grace? Reliability? A Critical Spirit?, etc.)
- Are there any words that you've spoke that, upon reflection, you know should not have been? Be specific.
- Are there any words that *should* have been spoken, but were not or have not been?
- Were there any times when you used words (or the absence of words) to control others' impressions of you or to give the wrong impression regarding another person? Be specific.

### **KNOW MY THOUGHTS...**

Our spirit is being fed by a constant flow of *inner* words - thoughts, perceptions and understandings. What has characterized your inner words of late? Are there any "tapes" that are playing over and over in your mind? The Psalm refers to *anxious thoughts*. What fears have been filtering through your thoughts? Again, be as specific as you can. Can you identify one or two root fears that seem to be underlying or driving the rest of them?

### **SEE IF THERE IS ANY OFFENSIVE WAY IN ME...**

Basic to most conflicts is the tendency to magnify the offenses of others and minimize your own. Consider these words of Lee Strobel:

...more often than not, we share part of the blame for pushing a person into the role of being our enemy. Sometimes it's our own jealousy, our own stubbornness, our own ambition, or our own bad attitude that has contributed - at least in part - to the rift between us. Few things accelerate the peace process as much as humbly admitting our own wrongdoing and asking forgiveness. That tells our adversaries that we're so serious about dealing honorably with the friction between us that we're willing to go beyond pride and self interest to confess that, yes, we do own some of the responsibility for the rift.

Take time to reflect on any "offensive ways" you have brought to the conflict. It might include some of those things Lee mentioned: jealousy, stubbornness, unhealthy ambition, bad attitude - or other unhealthy or sinful relating patterns. Putting aside any tendency to be vague, answer this question as concretely as possible:

- I contributed to the conflict in the following specific ways:

Read I Corinthians 13: 1- 7. Write out the traits of love.

Did you find yourself saying "ouch " to any of these traits as they pertain to your conduct? Are there any ways you have failed to reflect love in the conflict situation? True confession is not just an exchange of information. It involves entering into the pain of the one hurt. What might it have felt like to be on the *other side* of your "offensive ways "? Really try to put yourself in the place of the other person.

Read Luke 18: 9-14 and then consider this story told by Max Lucado:

During World War I, a German soldier plunged into an out-of-the-way shell hole. There He found a wounded enemy. The fallen soldier was soaked with blood and only minutes from death. Touched by the plight of the man, the German soldier offered him water. Through this small kindness a bond was developed. The dying man pointed to his shirt pocket; the German soldier took from it a wallet and removed some family pictures. He held them so the wounded man could gaze at his loved ones one final time. With bullets raging over them and war all around them, these two enemies were, but for a few moments, friends.

What happened in that shell hole? Did any evil cease? Were all wrongs made right? No. What happened was simply this: Two enemies saw each other as humans in need of help. This is forgiveness. Forgiveness begins by rising above the war, looking beyond the uniform, and choosing to see the other, not as a foe or even as a friend but simply as a fellow fighter trying to make it home safely.

In the Grip of Grace

- What is God saying to you through these passages?

### **LEAD ME IN YOUR EVERLASTING WAYS...**

Perhaps the most significant question we can ask during a time of pain, confusion or conflict is this: *What transforming work is God trying to accomplish?* Spend some time in quietness before God, laying that question before Him. Listen. Hear. Don't rush through. How is God trying to bring His transforming, "everlasting ways" more deeply to your life? To your relationships? To your ministry?

- What is your most significant "take-away" from this time of reflection?

# RESOURCES

- EVERYBODY'S NORMAL TILL YOU GET TO KNOW THEM by John Ortberg  
Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- THE RENOVATION OF THE HEART by Dallas Willard  
NavPress, Colorado Springs, Colorado
- LIFE TOGETHER by Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
Fortress Press, Minneapolis
- COMMUNITY AND GROWTH by Jean Vanier  
Paulist Press, New York
- THE DELICATE ART OF DANCING WITH PORCUPINES by Bob Phillips
- THE ART OF FORGIVING by Lewis B. Smedes  
Ballantine Books, New York
- FORGIVE AND FORGET by Lewis B. Smedes  
Ballantine Books, New York
- GUIDING PEOPLE THROUGH CONFLICT by Peacemaker Ministries
- NOT THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE: A BREVIARY OF SIN by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.
- LEADING YOUR CHURCH THROUGH CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION  
by Marshall Shelley
- THE PEACEMAKER by Ken Sande
- CHRISTIANITY **101** by Gilbert Bilezikian
- COMMUNITY **101** by Gilbert Bilezikian
- QUICK SCRIPTURE REFERENCE FOR COUNSELING by John G. Kruis
- WHEN YOU CAN'T SAY "I FORGIVE YOU" by Grace Ketterman and David Hazard
- GROUPS : THE LIFE-GIVING POWER OF COMMUNITY – PURSUING SPIRITUAL  
TRANSFORMATION by John Ortberg, Laurie Pederson & Judson Poling