**Resolving Conflict in Healthy, Biblical Ways**

**A 12-Day Devotional Guide**

**For Broadway Baptist Church**

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**Reading Suggestions**

The following guide draws from the truth of Scripture and God’s instruction regarding the belief and hope that broken and strained relationships can be restored.

God has raised up people throughout history who have been champions of this hope and reconciliation found in Christ. Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson are two of those champions God has used to speak to His church about reconciliation and peacemaking.

Their work “Resolving Everyday Conflict” gives practical teaching and instruction for every person who desires healthy relationships. The Scripture along with teaching from this book form the basis for this devotional guide. All of the following devotions begin with Scripture and highlight the biblical teaching shared by Sande and Johnson.

Please read one devotion a day, giving quality time and your best effort to do the needed work of prayer and taking daily steps that lead to effective conflict resolution and reconciliation in your own life.

**Day 1 - The Source of Conflict**

**James 4:1-3 (NASB)** What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? **2**You lust and do not have; *so,* you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; *so,* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. **3**You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

James asks a great question and gives a pointed answer regarding conflict. The question: What is the source of conflict? The answer: “Your pleasures that wage war in your members.”

Our desires or pleasures are at the root of most conflict. The desires we have aren’t always sinful. But when our desires turn into demands and we begin to feel “we must have what we want or else”, they can lead to sinful behavior.

From a very early age most of us falsely believed “I should have what I want.” As children, when we didn’t get our way, we at times sulked, pouted, cried, and threw a tantrum. These early childhood responses stem from the fact that the scripture describes us all as sinners. Romans 3:23 states “All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.” We have been described in scripture like “sheep going astray, each of us going our own way.” Because we are sinners, we want our own way. This behavior is often carried into adulthood. As children and sometimes as adults, we falsely believe we should get our way.

Conflict occurs when we want a particular thing and the person we have conflict with, wants something different. The two differing desires clash and the result is conflict.

To begin a journey of resolving conflict in a healthy, biblical way, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us identify our desires and how they clash or differ with the person we have conflict with.

**Prayer**: Lord, reveal my desires that form the basis for the current conflict? What do I want strongly? What are the desires of the other person? How do they differ? What do I value greatly that is being “stepped on” by the other person?

**Next Step Challenge**: Identify the passions and desires of your heart that form the basis of your current conflict. Ask “What do I want and think I should have?”

**Day 2 - In Conflict with God**

**Romans 5:6-11** **6**For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **7**For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. **8**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. **9**Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath *of God* through Him. **10**For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. **11**And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

In our sinful condition before we placed faith in Jesus and began to follow him as Lord, we were in conflict with God. This passage describes us as previously, helpless (verse 6a), ungodly (verse 6b), under the wrath of God (verse 9) and enemies of God (verse 10). In spite of being enemies of God and objects of His wrath, God loved us (verse 8), and expressed that love by sending his son Jesus to ultimately die on the cross for our sins (verse 6).

God took the initiative to address the conflict that existed between us and Him. He took the first step toward resolving the conflict and reconciling the broken relationship that existed because of our sin (verse 10). The good news of the gospel is that God reached out to us as helpless, ungodly people who by their sin had declared war against a Holy God. God had every right to reject us and punish us, however he sent His son Jesus to die in our place, thus extending to us His grace, mercy and offer of forgiveness and eternal life.

**Prayer**: As you remember your sinful condition apart from Christ, thank God that he took the initiative to reconcile you to Him through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Thank God for his grace extended to you through the gospel. Thank God that you are no longer in conflict with God, but you are now a child of His through faith in Jesus.

**Next Step Challenge**: How can I reflect the gospel in taking the initiative to resolve my current conflict? How can I apply the gospel to my conflict? What difference does the gospel make in how I seek to reconcile the strained relationship(s) in my life?

**Day 3 - Unhealthy Responses to Conflict / Part 1**

**James 4:1-3**What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? **2**You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. **3**You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

There are healthy ways to respond to conflict and there are unhealthy ways. According to James, our pleasures or desires can escalate to the point that they become our demands. We must have them. If we do not get them, we may choose to respond in ways that are sinful and destructive. James points out some of these sinful responses in verse 2 as he cites “fighting,” “quarreling,” and “murder.” These responses are ways we attempt to attack the other person when we engage in conflict with them.

Attack responses could involve verbally sparring with the person, name calling, or attacking their personhood, motives or character. At times attacking may take on a passive aggressive form with our verbal attacks being shared with other parties and not with the person whom we have conflict with. We thus attack the person behind their back in the presence of those who lend us a sympathetic, listening ear.

In the book Resolving Everyday Conflict, Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson share three basic ways that people tend to respond to conflict; 1) attack, 2) avoid and 3) make peace. Two of these responses are unhealthy, unbiblical and result in a continuation of strained and broken relationships. The third (making peace) is rooted in the gospel and the clear teaching of the bible on how to respond when conflict occurs.

**Prayer**: Lord, help me to identify my default tendency when I encounter conflict. Do I tend to attack the other person? In what ways are my “attacks” often expressed? I confess times when I have sinfully responded by attacking others. Please forgive me.

**Next Step Challenge**: Ask God to help free you from an attack response as a default. Identify the different expressions of attack responses.

**Day 4 - Unhealthy Responses to Conflict / Part 2**

A second unhealthy way to respond to conflict identified by Sande and Johnson is to escape or avoid conflict. This is the default of people who feel it is too painful to lean in and deal with the issues. They would rather avoid the person(s) and issues involved than address them and talk through them.

Avoiding sometimes takes the form of leaving a relationship, a job, a church or a marriage.

Sande points out that avoidance responses are usually “peacefaking” instead of peacemaking, trying to give the appearance that things are OK when they are not.

According to Sande, escape responses may take the following form.

 Deny it and pretend it doesn’t exist

 Flight or running away

**Prayer**: Lord, help me to identify my default tendency when I encounter conflict. Do I attempt to avoid people and conflict? What expressions have my “avoidance” taken? I confess times when I have sinfully avoided conflict to the detriment of my spiritual growth and my relationships with people. Please forgive me.

**Next Step Challenge**: Ask God to help free you from an avoiding response as a default.

Answer the following statements with “True” or “False”

1. All conflict is bad.
2. Christians should always agree.
3. Working through conflict does more harm than good.
4. When I attempt to avoid conflict, I am focusing on the betterment of the other person.

The correct response to each of the four statements above is “false.”

**Day 5 - Freed By the Gospel**

**1 Corinthians 5:17-19**

**17**Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. **18**Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, **19**namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

The gospel of Jesus Christ frees us to respond to conflict is ways that are spiritually healthy. Due to our sinful nature we may have destructive default tendencies that have found expression most of our lives. However, we are not destined to default to those unhealthy responses for the remainder of our lives. The gospel frees us to relate to people in the same way we have been treated by Christ – with grace and forgiveness.

The gospel makes us new creatures, the gospel enables us to put away old destructive habits and put on new life-giving ones.

As people who have responded in faith to the gospel, we are beneficiaries of God’s ministry of reconciliation. He reconciled us to himself through the death of His Son.

As people who have responded in faith to the gospel, we have been given a ministry of reconciliation and thus the responsibility to reconcile people to one another and to Christ.

**Prayer:**  Lord help me to walk in the identity of who I truly am in Christ, a saved, transformed child of God that has been “made new” by the gospel. Help me to live in grace that I have received from Jesus by extending that same grace to others when I find myself in conflict with them.

**Next Step Challenge**: As you move forward, recognize ways the gospel frees you to respond differently. Live in the truth of your real identity in Christ.

**Day 6 - Casting Down Idols**

**1 John 5:21**

Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

**Colossians 3:5**

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Idolatry can take forms other than bowing to a man-made graven image. In Colossians 3:5 Paul classified acts of immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, and greed, as idolatry. Anything that takes God’s rightful place in our life becomes an idol. Anything we want more than the betterment of a relationship with a brother or sister in Christ or anything we want more than the betterment of our relationship with God is an idol.

We read how James said that our desires when in conflict, can escalate to demands, and then lead to fighting, quarreling and even murder (James 4).

When in the heat of conflict, it is good to reflect on this question, “What do I want so strongly that I am willing to sacrifice the betterment of my relationship with God and the betterment of my relationship with a brother or sister in Christ?

**Prayer:** God help me to identify the idol(s) or thing that I want most, that led to the escalation of this conflict.

**Next Step Commitment**: Resolving Everyday Conflict. Finish this sentence: “In this conflict, the thing I want most and the thing I value that has been “stepped on” by the other person is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Day 7 - Glorify God When in Conflict**

 **1 Corinthians 10:31**

 “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the **glory** **of God**.”

We were created to glorify God. We were saved to bring glory to God with our redeemed lives lived daily for Jesus. Scripture challenges us to seek to glorify God in everything we do. We should eat and drink in ways that glorify Him. This verse says “in everything you do” glorify God. Does that include navigating conflict? Most definitely.

We sometimes navigate conflict by focusing first on ourselves and our hurt or on the other person and their wrongdoing.

A better way to start the journey of conflict resolution is to focus on God and ask this question, “How can I glorify God as I navigate this conflict?” In doing so, we bring God into the picture. We thus refuse to begin with ourselves, our hurt, or the other person’s wrong, but we begin by considering what most pleases God in terms of our response.

Ken Sande in Resolving Everyday Conflict states that our tendency to ignore God in the midst of conflict is a tremendous obstacle to peace.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to see conflict as an opportunity to glorify you and be a living example of the gospel.

**Next Step Challenge:** Consider how you will choose to please, honor and glorify God as you move forward and navigate this conflict.

**Day 8 - Get the Log Out**

**Matthew 7:3-5**

 **3**Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? **4**Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? **5**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.

When conflict occurs, our major focus is often on what the other person has said or done that bothers us. In considering how the conflict should be resolved we often think, “If they would just get their act together and change, we would be OK.” Conflict is never one sided. It is never the sole fault of the other person. Both individuals or groups often contribute in some way.

If asked to put a percentage on our own contribution to the conflict we might respond by saying, “I have only contributed 3% to the conflict. The other person has contributed 97%. We often consider ourselves as “three percenters” because of our pride. Pride sees other people’s faults and sins to the neglect of it’s own.

Jesus cuts to the heart of our pride by saying “first take the log out of your own eye.” We begin this work of self-evaluation by asking “What contribution have I made to this conflict?”

We have a responsibility to both identify our part and to confess our part both to God and the other person.

**Prayer:** Lord, show me ways I have contributed to this conflict. Forgive me when I minimize what I have done and maximized what the other person has done.

**Next Step Commitment:** Consider what you are willing to own and confess (to God and the other person) as it relates to your part in this conflict.

**Day 9 - Gently Engage**

**Galatians 6:1**

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted

**Matthew 18:15-18**

**15**“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. **16**But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. **17**If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. **18**Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

While it is essential to first address your own faults and sins related to a conflict, there is also an appropriate time to address the other person’s faults and sins that have led to the conflict.

According to Galatians 6:1, the way we approach the other person about their faults is very important. In this verse Paul uses the term “restore.” The picture in the Greek language is one of resetting a broken bone. If you have ever experienced broken a bone and the subsequent resetting process, it is never pleasant, but always needed. The process of resetting the broken bone, begins the process of healing.

Approaching the other person and engaging in honest conversation (with gentleness) regarding the issues is a needed step in healing a broken relationship.

**Prayer:** Ask God to give you the courage to lean into the needed work of talking through this conflict with the other person. Ask God to give you the needed grace to talk through it in a graceful, tactful, and humble way.

**Next Step Commitment:** Consider how you will tactfully communicate with the other person regarding your perception of their part in this conflict.

**Day 10 - Get Reconciled**

**Matthew 5:23-24**

**23**Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24**leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

Imagine the offering time in your church. Imagine the usher approaching you to give you your opportunity to drop your cash or check into the offering plate that is in his hand. Before he hands you the plate, he asks you a poignant question, “Does anyone you know of, have any conflict with you?” You honestly share with him the conflict at hand. He refuses to pass you the offering plate. He asks you to leave the worship service and go and attempt to be reconciled with your brother. You leave the service and as you walk to your car, what do you feel? Angry? Surprised? Relieved? Scared?

Though this scenario may be new to your thinking, it was not foreign to Jesus. In this portion of his Sermon on the Mount, he shared the importance of making things right and seeking to be reconciled when we find ourselves in strained and broken relationships. He implies that forgiveness and reconciliation is a prerequisite to true and meaningful worship of God. He certainly communicated the priority and importance of seeking reconciliation in our relationships.

The fourth step in resolving conflict according to Sande is to Get Reconciled. Reconciliation involves forgiving others and finding reasonable solutions to the issues that divide you from them.

**Prayer:** Reflect on the forgiveness shown to you in Christ. Ask God to give you the grace to truly forgive the other person in the same way you have been forgiven by God. Confess your inability to forgive apart from the grace and help of God. Ask God to help you take steps that would lead to reconciliation in your relationship.

**Next Step Commitment:** Ask God to help you know your “next step” on your journey toward needed reconciliation.

**Day 11 - Offering a Genuine Confession**

James 5:16 Therefore, **confess** your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

1 John 1:9 If we **confess** our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Confession is indeed good for the soul! The Greek word “confess” literally means “to say the same thing.” When we confess our sins to God, we are saying the same thing about our sin that God says about it. We take sides with God in condemning the sin and through confession we seek to repent of that same sin and not repeat it. When we truly confess our sins, God truly forgives us and cleanses us from that sin. Scripture encourages us to regularly confess our sins to God and experience the freedom that accompanies His grace and forgiveness.

Confession is also good for relationships. Relationships can be strained and broken as a result of our sins. The good news is that our relationships can be restored, and we can be reconciled to the very people we were once in conflict with. The journey of reconciliation begins with the first step of confession. Scripture not only encourages us to confess our sins to God, it also encourages us to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16).

In confessing our sins to one another, we say the same thing about our sins that God says about them, we don’t try to rationalize them, we verbalize the serious nature of the sins and how we feel they have hurt the other person and the relationship.

In the book Resolving Everyday Conflict, Ken Sande gives 7 words of instruction as it relates to making an effective and meaningful confession or apology to another person.

Here are the Seven “A’s” of a confession

1. Address everyone involved.

2. Avoid “if” “but” and “maybe.

3. Admit specifically.

4. Acknowledge the hurt.

5. Accept the consequences.

6. Alter your behavior.

7. Ask for forgiveness and allow time.

**Prayer:** Though prayer, prepare yourself for a real and meaningful confession. Ask God to reveal your sins and to help you know what you need to confess and how you need to confess it to the other person.

**Next Step Commitment:** Prepare for a confession, keeping in mind the seven A’s mentioned above

**Day 12 - What Genuine Forgiveness Involves**

**Ephesians 4:32**

“Be kind to **one** **another**, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has **forgive**n you.”

Christians are recipients of God’s grace and forgiveness. Through confession of sin and placing our faith in the finished work of Jesus, our broken relationship with God is restored and we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Psalm 103:12 states, “As far as **the** **east** **is** **from** **the** **west**, so far has He removed our transgressions **from** us.” When God forgives us, he removes the transgression from us and remembers our sin no more.

In Resolving Everyday Conflict, Ken Sande shares four commitments we need to make to the other person(s) when we forgive them.

1. I will not dwell on this incident.
2. I will not bring up this incident and use it against you.
3. I promise that I won’t talk to others about this incident.
4. I promise I won’t allow this incident to stand between our personal relationship.

**Prayer:** Spend time thanking God for his grace and forgiveness shown to you. Thank Him for restoring your strained and broken relationship with Him.

**Next step commitment**: Consider the next steps you need to take to genuinely forgive the other person.