

**LIFE GROUP
CONFLICT
RESOLUTION +
PEACEMAKING
GUIDE**



Conflict is an inevitable part of life.

Each of us face conflict on a regular basis, some of which can be particularly challenging to navigate. As Christians, the way we handle conflict should look drastically different from the world around us.

Each conflict we face presents us with an opportunity to glorify God, serve others, and become more like Jesus.

As Life Group leaders, it is possible that you will either find yourself in conflict with others or mediating conflict between people in your group. We trust you and know that you are capable of caring for those in your group. This guide serves as a reference to provide you with more information about biblical peacemaking if you desire it.

THE GOAL OF BIBLICAL PEACEMAKING

Followers of Jesus are called to look different than the world (Ephesians 4:22-24, Romans 12:2) and this can be demonstrated clearly to others by the way they handle conflict. The Bible commands Christians to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). This means that the goal of biblical peacemaking is always to pursue forgiveness and reconciliation.

THE REASON FOR BIBLICAL PEACEMAKING

The Bible is our blueprint. God’s Word has much to say about how to handle conflict. God knew that we would face human conflict in this life as fallen sinners. Because of this, he has given us a framework for how to navigate these conflicts in a way that is pleasing to him, builds up the church, and preserves unity.

Ultimately, we pursue forgiveness and reconciliation to follow the example that Jesus has set for us. He forgave us first and reconciled us to him despite our sin. As a result, he commands us to do the same with others.

¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

We forgive because God first forgave us. He counted the cost of our sin, and he paid for it himself on the cross. To forgive someone in your life means to do the same. Count the cost of the offense against you and do not require reparations for it. Instead, be reconciled to that person in restored relationship. This is our ministry as Christians.

THE MATTHEW 18 MODEL

Jesus himself does not leave us guessing on how to reconcile as Christians. He lays down a clear framework for conflict resolution and peacemaking that we are to replicate:

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”
(Matthew 18:15-17)

1 Just Between the Two of You

The first step Jesus gives is to address conflict individually. If you are facing conflict with someone in your group or someone is sinning against you, pull them aside and address it face to face. This could be over a cup of coffee, sometime after a group meeting, or even over the phone if need be.

Walk into this conversation with humility and listen first to what they have to say. If you have any part to own, own it fully. Our goal is never to win the argument at the cost of losing a brother or sister. Those who are great at winning arguments are often terrible at making peace. These conversations can be very difficult. Give time to process, to digest, and to heal as needed, but if the conflict does not resolve, go to the next step.

2 Take One or Two Others

If the conflict has not been resolved after individual confrontation, bring in the company of others. These can be other members of your Life Group or trusted individuals who are aware of the situation and want to bring peace. Those who are brought in should carry a similar spirit of humility and grace, being willing to listen and respond with spiritual maturity. The main goal is always to pursue reconciliation and forgiveness.

THE MATTHEW 18 MODEL (CONTINUED)

3 Tell it to the Church

If the conflict cannot be resolved in the presence of others, Jesus instructs us to then involve the church. In a situation where peace cannot be brought forward, bring it to our groups staff or other church leadership and let us step in to help mediate and seek peace. Let the church be the bad guy and the source of authority if needed.

4 Treat Them As...

When someone will not respond to the reconciliation attempts of an individual, a group, and the church, Jesus instructs us to “treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector”. This does not mean that we ostracize or cast out, but rather we treat them as a non-believer. We evangelize, disciple, and walk with them like we would with anyone who is not part of the church. In the meantime we continue to outline a clear path for them to pursue unity and restoration. Part of this process could include removing them from your Life group depending on the situation.

GUIDANCE FOR INDIVIDUAL + GROUP CONFLICT CONVERSATIONS

The following are a few quick summary statements on the heart, attitude, and methods of peacemaking and conflict resolution that you may find helpful.

Pray.

Invite God into every attempt at reconciliation through prayer and Scripture. Ask for His help and guidance in all peacemaking situations.

Be about others.

Conflict gives us the opportunity to “consider others better than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3-4) and in doing so, adopt the heart of Christ so that we may become like Jesus and join him on mission. We do not worship an outcome but rather our God who himself is peace.

Own your part.

Conflict is rarely, if ever, a one-way street. Take time and ask God to reveal which part is yours to own, then own every bit of it. Even if you only have 2% to own, own 100% of that 2%.

Ask for forgiveness.

Let the other person express all of their hurt. Ask them if there are any other hurts they would like to address. Take time to process all that they have said and do not rush to justify (Matthew 7:3-5).

Seek urgency.

The Bible is clear that peace is pressing (Matthew 5:23-25; Ephesians 4:26). As much as “giving space” sounds nice, it is not an idea that is present in Scripture. To the best of your ability, settle matters quickly. Do so out of obedience to God and make every effort to restore peace quickly.

GUIDANCE FOR INDIVIDUAL + GROUP CONFLICT CONVERSATIONS (CONTINUED)

Look beyond the small.

If you can overlook a small offense, do so. Don't let the little hang ups cause larger conflicts. Be willing to let the little things go in the pursuit of a greater peace (Proverbs 19:11).

Express your hurt.

As you do so, pray for humility and wisdom. Plan your words carefully and plan responses to likely reactions. Do so in the right time and context, and approach in love. Ultimately trust God with their response. You cannot control their response.

Persevere in seeking unity.

Do not give up if an initial conversation does not resolve your conflict. Pursue every avenue to bring unity. Follow the Matthew 18 model as much as you can. Move forward in continual prayer. Resolution sometimes takes perseverance but is necessary for protecting the unity that God desires.

Proceed in a biblical mindset.

If a conflict comes to a resolution in a personal manner, there still may be logistics that need to be dealt with (money, property, responsibility, parenting, etc.). Turn to scripture, to the council of your group or the church, and continue in prayer to proceed in a manner that promotes unity.

