

Peacemaking

Responding to Conflict Biblically

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Preface

Peacemaker® Ministries and Turning Point Ministries have joined together to produce this small group curriculum—*Peacemaking: Responding to Conflict Biblically*. This small group bible study is based on *The Peacemaker* (revised and updated) by Ken Sande.

The approach used in *Peacemaking* to resolving conflict may be summarized in four basic principles:

- Glorify God.* Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord and bring him praise by depending on his forgiveness, wisdom, power, and love as we seek to faithfully obey his commands and maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude (Psalm 37:1-6; Mark 11:25; John 14:15; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:2-9; Colossians 3:1-4; James 3:17-18; 4:1-3; 1 Peter 2:12).
- Get the log out of your eye.* Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God's mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts—confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused (Proverbs 28:13; Matthew 7:3-5; Luke 19:8; Colossians 3:5-14; 1 John 1:8-9).
- Gently restore.* Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will overlook minor offenses or we will talk personally and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. When a conflict with a Christian brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner (Proverbs 19:11; Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:29; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; James 5:9).
- Go and be reconciled.* Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation—forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences (Matthew 5:23-24; 6:12; 7:12; Ephesians 4:1-3, 32; Philippians 2:3-4).

This course shows how these principles may be applied in the home, workplace, church, and neighborhood. Among other things it explains:

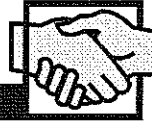
- How to use conflict as an opportunity to please and honor God.
- Why Christians should resolve disputes in church and not in court.
- Why you can trust God to help you even in the most difficult conflicts.
- When it is appropriate simply to overlook an offense.
- When it is appropriate to confront others regarding sinful behavior.

As you learn to deal with these issues in a biblical way, you can develop an entirely new approach to resolving conflict. Instead of reacting to disputes in a confused, defensive, or angry manner, you can learn to manage conflict confidently and constructively. This material describes the principles required for effective conflict management. This study is designed for small group interaction and can be used in home groups, support groups, cell groups, and Sunday school. The material is also applicable for personal study. May the Lord bless, challenge, and encourage you in this study.

Orientation

**Personal
Preparation:
Getting Ready for
Orientation**

W elcome



Personal Notes

Welcome to *Peacemaking*. You have taken a positive step. We thank God for you.

During this course, there will be suggested time alone with God in meditation, prayer, and scripture reading. This time with God is vital to being a peacemaker. We encourage you to be faithful in your devotion time with the Lord.

S elf-Awareness



Peacemakers are people who breathe grace. They draw continually on the goodness and power of Jesus Christ, and then they bring his love, mercy, forgiveness, strength, and wisdom to the conflicts of daily life. God delights to breathe his grace through peacemakers and use them to dissipate anger, improve understanding, promote justice, and encourage repentance and reconciliation.

We are glad for each of you who has joined this group. By way of introduction, I want to spend a few minutes talking about the purpose of this group and what our procedures will be each week.

The *Peacemaking* group is a small group (usually fewer than 12 people) who want to better understand issues of conflict in a biblical way which can be an entirely new approach to resolving conflict. Instead of reacting to disputes in a confused, defensive, or angry manner, we can learn to **respond to conflict** confidently and constructively.

In this group we will look at the principles required for effective conflict management and provide numerous illustrations of how they have been used to resolve actual disputes and lawsuits. (The stories told in the *Peacemaking* material are based on real situations, but the names of the people and distinguishing facts have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.)

Here are the elements of a typical meeting:

Session 1 Conflict Provides Opportunities

**Personal Preparation:
Getting Ready for
Session One**

"Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21).

M Meet With God



Personal Notes

Take 30 minutes each day to be alone with God in meditation and prayer. Read Matthew 25 and Philippians 2.

What are some positive and negative ways you can think of to respond to conflict?

Self-Awareness



This story illustrates how people may have different perspectives regarding a situation or an issue:

In 1986 I was hiking with three friends in the Beartooth Mountains in southern Montana. It was early in the summer, and the streams were still swollen from melting snow. Ten miles into the mountains, we came to a stream where the bridge had been washed away. The water was deep and icy cold. There was one place where we might have been able to cross by leaping from rock to rock, but it would have meant risking a fall into the rapids.

As we stood there trying to decide what to do, three different perspectives surfaced. One person saw the stream as a dangerous obstacle. Afraid that one of us might fall in and be swept away, he wanted to turn back and look for another trail. Another friend saw the stream as a means to show how tough he was. He wanted to wade straight across, even if that meant we would be wet and cold for a few hours. But two of us saw the stream as an interesting challenge. We studied the rocks leading to the other side and determined where we would need additional footing. Finding a fallen tree in the woods, we laid it across the largest gap between the rocks.

Personal
Preparation:
Getting Ready for
Session One

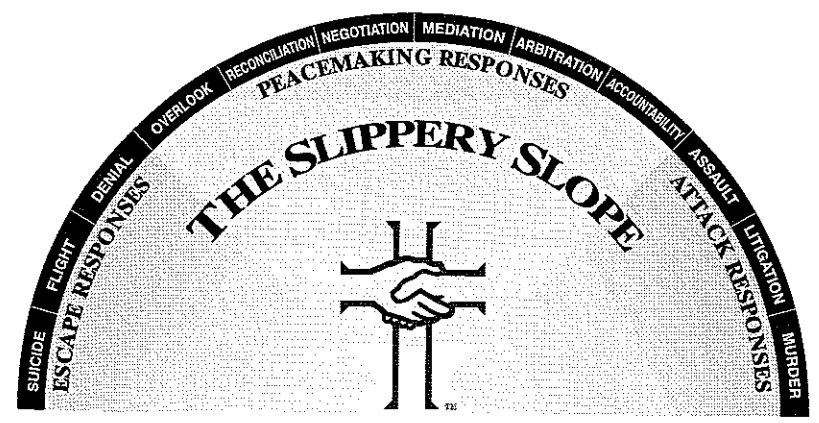
Notes

At this point, our two friends began to cooperate with us. Working together, we managed to get one person over to the other bank. Then two of us stood on rocks in the middle of the stream and the packs were passed to the other side. One by one, we jumped from rock to rock, receiving support from the person ahead. Before long, we were all on the far bank, and we were perfectly dry and exhilarated by our accomplishment.

People look at conflict in much the same way as the stream was viewed in this story. To some, conflict is a hazard that threatens to sweep them off their feet and leave them bruised and hurting. To others, it is an obstacle that they should conquer quickly and firmly, but a few people have learned that conflict is an opportunity to solve common problems in a way that honors God and offers benefits to those involved. As you will see, the latter view can transform the way you respond to conflict.

The Slippery Slope of Conflict

There are three basic ways people respond to conflict. These responses may be arranged on a curve that resembles a hill. On the left slope of the hill we find the *escape responses* to conflict. On the right side we find the *attack responses*. And in the center we find the *peacemaking responses*.



Imagine that this hill is covered with ice. If you go too far to the left or the right, you can lose your footing and slide down the slope. Similarly, when you experience conflict, it is easy to become defensive or antagonistic. Both responses make matters worse and can lead to more extreme reactions.

Fortunately, there are two things you can do to stay on top of this slippery slope: You can learn to resist the natural inclination to escape or attack when faced with conflict, and you can develop the ability to use the conciliation response that is best suited to resolving a particular conflict. Let's look at all the responses in more detail.

Escape Responses

The three responses found on the left side of the slippery slope are called the *escape responses*. People tend to use these responses when they are more interested in avoiding a conflict than in resolving it.

Denial. One way to escape from a conflict is to pretend it does not exist. Another way is to refuse to do what should be done to resolve a conflict properly.

What kind of results have you seen to denial?

Flight. Another way to escape from a conflict is to run away. This may mean ending a friendship, quitting a job, filing for divorce, or changing churches.

What kind of responses have you seen to flight?

Suicide. When people lose all hope of resolving a conflict, they may seek to escape the situation (or make a desperate cry for help) by attempting to take their own lives. Suicide is never the right way to deal with conflict. Tragically, however, suicide has become a major cause of death among adolescents in the United States, partly because our children have never learned how to deal with conflict constructively.