

Island ECC Positional Paper

Conflict Resolution

Facing relational conflict is uncomfortable and irrespective of the causes, will affect our daily rhythms and routines and impact our emotional life. As Christians, despite the command to “love first” we can still be hurt or angered by those around us who can cause us to doubt God’s love for us and His will for our lives. However, God can and does use conflict to teach us things about ourselves, to refine our character, to draw us closer to Him, and, ultimately, to bring us to glorify Himself.

Despite the many conflicts that run through the Biblical narrative, the Bible is full of wisdom about preventing or dealing with conflict. At Island ECC we encourage all those involved in any kind of conflict to use these four sound Biblical principles which provide the best approach to achieving lasting and satisfying peace; by following the processes of REFLECTION, EXAMINATION, RECONCILIATION and RESOLUTION.

At the outset, be aware of several danger areas:

- Beware of sitting on your anger or hurt, hoping that it will simply go away. It won’t.
- Be careful of drawing others into a conflict to seek support for your side.
- Do not make an issue or a problem into a personal crusade.
- Anger is a reaction not a directive that requires action. Beware of using it to be defensive.

In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Ephesians 4:26

1. Reflect and seek God first.

It is more than likely that going to God is probably the last thing we want to do. However, we will not find reconciliation without Him, so it is to God that we must go first, without fear of condemnation.

- Be honest. When we are angry or hurt it is difficult to pray, just speak to God exactly like it is.
- Be open to God gently changing your heart and giving you courage to see the conflict with clarity.
- Ask God to show you specifically how much of the problem may be your fault.
- Allow God to help you maintain integrity to avoid involving others in gossip or taking sides.
- Ask God to help you see the other person as created in the image of God.
- Pray for the will to seek reconciliation in a way that will glorify God and give witness to His grace.
- Remember that our chief purpose in life is “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” We cannot do either while we remain at odds with others.

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Corinthians 13:11

2. Practice self-examination.

While we might be feeling unjustly treated or aggrieved, we are rarely simply an innocent victim. Therefore, an important step in any biblical approach to conflict resolution is turning our gaze inward.

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? Matthew 7:3-5

In most conflict, there is some degree of personal contribution that must be acknowledged.

- What attitude or heart issue on my part may have contributed to the conflict?
- How might my response to a hurt or offense have intensified the division?
- Did I say something which was not intended to be offensive but was taken that way?
- Ask God for humility to accept fault and be prepared to ask for forgiveness.
- Avoid excuses for attitudes, words, and any degree of self-justification.
- It may help to ask a trusted, independent third party to help you evaluate your actions and attitudes.
- The purpose at this stage is to prepare your heart sufficiently to seek reconciliation that glorifies God.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. 1 John 1:8



3. Seek reconciliation.

Seeking to restore a relationship can be intimidating especially when we prefer to avoid the other person for fear of an angry tirade or dismissal of the problem or the offense. But God knows repairing broken relationships is important:

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23-24

Intentionally prepare in advance for the occasion:

- Select the time and environment carefully.
- Don't meet when either party is tired or pushed for time.
- Seek privacy and a mutually suitable setting.
- Seek to meet as soon as is realistically possible.

Follow guidelines to assist with a successful meeting.

- State your intention to use the time to build up the relationship and repair any damage to it.
- Be prepared to confess mistakes, wrong attitudes or words, and request forgiveness.
- Do all you can to listen to the other's feelings, while being willing to humbly sharing yours.
- Beware of stating "you made me feel..." Instead, simply say "I felt..."
- Do not disregard or minimize the emotions of the other person.
- Seek to defuse the anger or stress they may feel by not being defensive.
- Be patient throughout the process, giving time for you each to share and each to listen with the goal of mutual understanding.
- Be gentle with yourself and the other person. Gentleness is never easy but it is always fruitful.

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1

Be attentive to the way you speak. How we say something is as important as what we say

- Use words that are helpful or edifying, that build upon cooperation and consideration.
- If a conversation escalates adversely, gently disengage and pause.
- If a conversation turns unavoidably negative, ask that you resume the discussion later. Resume only when both parties are ready to move forward in a positive way. Consider a moderator if necessary.
- Recognize that God can change people and will do so often through the process, even a painful one.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

4. Move to resolution.

Christians often have legitimate, honest disagreements and differing opinions, but we can disagree without being disagreeable. God expects unity, not uniformity, but this doesn't mean giving up on finding a solution. Be resolved to move beyond the conflict by confronting the issues not the person, and solving the problem.

Listen to and respect different vantage points.

- Respond kindly even when you don't agree.
- Speak and listen openly but stay focused on the issue(s).
- Avoid insinuation with too many "I" statements.
- Attempt to find what actually lies at the root of the conflict, which is not always evident.

Be willing to negotiate a different approach.

- Insistence upon your own way will not bring resolution or cooperation.
- Find what you can agree on and focus on what you have in common.
- Agree to reestablish the relationship irrespective of resolving differences.



- Accept not being able to change certain things or people.
- Focus on what you both can change, including approaches, attitudes, and actions.

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Romans 14:19

Assistance in peace-making.

Sometimes two believers need outside help to resolve conflict between them and to restore objectivity. Thankfully, part of the blessing of living in our Christian community is that we are surrounded by others whose wise counsel and unbiased hearts can be called on to assist should the need arise. At Island ECC we have pastors, ministry leaders and Christian counsellors who are available within our church body to assist with the resolution of conflict.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. Matthew 18:15-17