

IV. STEPS TO SOLUTION



God honored the request of this twenty-year-old ... and then some.

*“Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people
and to distinguish between right and wrong. for who is able
to govern this great people of yours?”
(1 Kings 3:9)*

Solomon knew that God’s kindness to his father, David, was a result of his father’s faithfulness to God evidenced by righteous attitudes and actions. Now that Solomon is king, he feels the heavy weight of being the leader and judge of God’s people. Therefore, he confesses his own inadequacies, considering himself a mere child before God, and acknowledges his dependence on God for wisdom in resolving the conflicts of his people.

It so pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked for a wise and discerning mind that He not only gave him wisdom like no other but also bestowed riches and honor on him as well as the promise of a long life if he obeyed the Lord.

Solomon soon needed to call on that wisdom when two prostitutes came calling

...

*“Two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One
of them said, ‘My lord, this woman and I live in the same
house. I had a baby while she was there with me. The third
day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby.
We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of*

*us. During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast....' The other woman said, 'No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours.' But the first one insisted, 'No! The dead one is yours....' And so they argued before the king."
(1 Kings 3:16–22)*

A. Key Verse to Memorize

*"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."
(Romans 14:19)*

B. Key Passage to Read and Reread

Book of Philemon verses 1–25

Seven Principles for Facing Conflict

#1 Humility—Don't use your higher position to take advantage of those in a lower position.

vv. 8–9

#2 Integrity—Be absolutely honest about the problems.

vv. 10–11

#3 Vulnerability—Share your heart feelings.

vv. 12–13

#4 Submission—Don't force an action not under your control.

v. 14

#5 Optimism—Expect the best of another.

v. 14

#6 Faith—Remember the sovereign hand of God.

vv. 15–16

#7 Exhortation—Choose your words carefully.

v. 21

C. How to Apply the Five *Ws* and an *H* to Conflict Resolution

1. Who? Who is involved in the conflict?
 - Name those presently involved in the conflict.
 - List those who could be involved to bring about a solution.
2. What? What is your goal?
 - Put into writing what you want done.
 - Be clear—is this a onetime goal or a long-term goal?
3. Why? Why do you want to do it?
 - List the reasons for taking action.
 - List what will happen if you do not take action.
4. Where? Where will it happen?
 - Assess where you assume the conflict could be resolved.
 - Evaluate whether it could happen at another place.
5. When? When do you want it done?

- Establish a timeline from beginning to end.
 - List short-term, measurable goals.
6. How? How do you want it done?
- List the policies and procedures that need to be put in place.
 - List the guidelines needed to accomplish the goal.

*“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”
(Proverbs 15:22)*

D. How to Respond When Others Are Critical of You

Human nature says respond “in kind” to others—insult for insult, blow for blow. One of Christ’s clearest challenges to us is to not respond “in kind,” but to respond “in the Spirit.” To be Spirit-controlled rather than situation-controlled is not **natural** to human nature. Being Spirit-controlled **becomes natural** to the new nature that a believer receives at salvation—the very nature and mind of Christ. Undoubtedly, to counter evil for evil is natural, but to counter evil with good is the supernatural work of Christ within you.

*“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
(Romans 12:21)*

- **Be discerning** regarding the accuracy of the critical words of others.

Pray—

“Lord, help me not to accept all critical words as true, nor to reject all words as lies. Enable me to discern the false from the true. Put a hedge of protection around my mind so that I reject the lies. Allow my heart to accept constructive criticism that You may bring freedom to my life and change me.”

“The wise in heart are called discerning, and pleasant words promote instruction.” (Proverbs 16:21)

- **Be open** to the slightest kernel of truth when you are criticized.

Pray—

“Lord, if there is any truth in the critical words said about me, please convict my heart so that I might confess it and cooperate with You to change it.”

“A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool.” (Proverbs 17:10)

- **Be willing** to consider the criticism. If it is true, this person is God's megaphone to get your attention.

Pray—

"Lord, I accept this criticism as Your way of teaching me something I need to know. Please reveal to me what it is You are saying to me through the criticism."

"The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice." (Proverbs 12:15)

- **Be able** to receive criticism without being defensive.
 - Admit to any truth in the criticism.
 - Agree when you are in error.
 - Ask for further correction.

Pray—

"Lord, I admit that I . I agree that I was wrong. Please continue to use others to put me on a correction course when I'm off track in my attitudes or actions. And please continue to transform me more and more into the character of Christ."

"A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise." (Proverbs 15:12)

- **Be determined** to speak well of your critic.

Pray—

"Lord, I yield my tongue to You. I ask that You place a guard over my mouth so that I will only speak the truth in love to and will always speak well of to others. I pledge to focus on the good in and not on the bad."

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." (Romans 12:14)

- **Be dependent** on the Lord's perspective to determine your worth and value, not on the opinions of others.

Pray—

"Lord, thank You for establishing my worth and value by dying for me and adopting me into Your family. I will not live for the approval of people because I have Your approval, and that is all I need. Thank You for loving me."

"Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10)

E. The What, Why, and How of Boundaries

Boundaries are *established limits*—lines not to be crossed. When a boundary is exceeded, the result is a *repercussion*. If a boundary is honored, the result is a *reward*. When parents establish boundaries, their children are the ones who choose to go beyond the boundaries or to stay within them. This means that the children, not the parents, are the ones who *choose* the *repercussion* or the *reward*. The same is true when adults establish boundaries with one another as peers, friends, or spouses. This principle is clearly demonstrated when God set a *boundary* with Adam and Eve. In *choosing* to go beyond the boundary God established for them, they *chose* the *consequence* of their sin ... they *chose* the *repercussion*.

“To Adam he said, ‘Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat of it,” Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.’ ”
(Genesis 3:17)

Boundaries are ...

- The limits that establish a border (like a curb)
- The realization that we are separate from one another
- The basis of our individual identity

Boundaries say ...

- What we are

and

What we are not

- What we will choose

and

What we will not choose

- What we will endure

and

What we will not endure

- What we feel

and

What we do not feel

- What we like

and

What we do not like

- What we want

and

What we do not want

Boundaries help ...

Jesus pronounced, *“I did not come to bring peace, but a sword”* (Matthew 10:34). Jesus clearly communicated that we must seek to resolve what is wrong by cutting to the heart of the matter. He announced that *“the truth will set you free”* (John 8:32). At certain times, the sword of truth is necessary in order to live a life of integrity and make needed changes. When you do what is right in His sight, Jesus will give you His supernatural peace. Although not everything around you is peaceful, He can give you an internal ...

“Peace that transcends all understanding.”
(*Philippians 4:7*)

Establishing Boundaries

#1 Do ... Communicate your expectations clearly.

- Get on the person’s eye level.
- Prior to any problems, describe in detail what you expect of the person regarding your relationship.
- Form an agreement and ask for a statement of the person’s understanding of your expectations.

- When it is time for compliance with your agreement, give a gentle reminder.

Example of Parent to Child:

Don't Say:

“Don't you think it is time for you to go to bed now?”

Do Say:

“Remember, we agreed that your bedtime is 8:30. It is 8:20; so what do you need to be doing now?”

Example of Adult to Adult:

Don't Say:

“It is time for you to come home so that dinner won't be late.”

Do Say:

“I'm just calling to let you know I will be ready to serve dinner at six o'clock as we have agreed. If you aren't home by 6:20 or do not call, the children and I will go ahead and eat so they can start their homework.”

“Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ ” (Matthew 5:37)

#2 Do ... Establish negative repercussions for breaking an agreement.

- To establish effective repercussions, know what will make an impact.
- If possible, choose a repercussion related to the offensive behavior.
- Clearly communicate the repercussion.
- Prior to a problem, get the person's agreement to the repercussion.
- Allow the person to experience the repercussion if the agreement is broken.

Example of Parent to Child:

Tommy, age ten, lives on a busy street. He likes to ride his bicycle with his friend who lives across the street, but he was told never to cross the street without an adult. If Tommy disobeys, the *repercussion* is that he will not be allowed to ride his bicycle the next day.

Example of Adult to Adult:

Joe and Jennifer agree that he will leave work in time to pick her up at home at six o'clock and they will join some friends for dinner at a restaurant across town. The agreement is that Joe will be sure to pick

Jennifer up on time since they have reservations and can't be late. If Joe breaks their agreement by being late, the *repercussion* is that Jennifer will go to the restaurant without him even though Joe does not like for them to go places separately.

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11)

F. Recipe for Conflict Resolution

When life hands you lemons ... make lemonade! If you add the right ingredients, the same transformation may occur in your communication with a loved one. Practice following this easy recipe, and taste the sweetness of resolving painful differences.

*"Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."
(Proverbs 16:24)*

Confront ... The struggler squeezes all the juice out of the lemon. Plan a time to meet with your offender in order to release the juice from your lemon.

When one of you feels sour (hurt, frustrated, or unjustly treated), don't hold it in.

Communicate feelings ... Express your anger or an unmet need by squeezing out the truth in a loving, non-accusatory way.

- Share the problem using "I" statements.
 - "I'm feeling betrayed. Would you be willing to listen?"
- Describe only the upsetting words or behavior without criticizing character.
- Do not accuse, belittle, call names, or criticize.

"Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." (Proverbs 12:18)

"The tongue of the righteous is choice silver.... The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment." (Proverbs 10:20–21)

Instead, notice what Paul wrote:

"Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.... 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." (Ephesians 4:15, 26)

Comply ... The listener is a pitcher receiving *all* the juice.

The person being confronted indicates a **willingness to listen** (to receive the rebuke without becoming angry or defensive) and sincerely seeks to hear the speaker's pain.

- Respond with a willingness to give undivided attention.
 - “Yes, I will listen.”
- Do not interrupt. Hear the problem to the “last drop.”
- Above all, don't make excuses or become defensive.

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21)

Confirm ... The listener fills the pitcher with water with no acidic words.

The listener now **paraphrases the problem back** (repeats what is heard) without reacting negatively.

- Affirm what is being said.
 - “You are saying that you felt betrayed last night when I did not defend you? Is this correct?”
- Agreement with the facts is not necessary; therefore, do not attempt to justify anything.
- Ask if your restating of the problem is correct. If it is not, seek to understand what was said and repeat all.

“He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.” (Proverbs 15:31)

Change ... The struggler asks for sugar. If the receiver gives the sugar, the entire flavor changes!

After feelings have been delivered and received, the struggler is allowed to **request a change in behavior**. Willingness to listen and change behavior becomes the sweet ingredient for developing intimacy in the relationship.

- The struggler makes a request.
 - “When someone criticizes me in front of you, would you be willing to express emotional support by making a comment on my behalf or by walking away or asking the person to not talk about me when I'm not present to respond?”
- Listener identifies some acceptable responses for use in the future.
- Listener is willing to please the other with a commitment to change.

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:4)

Comfort ... The listener mixes the sugar and lemon juice well so there is no hint of the sour lemon. After a change in behavior has been agreed on, the listener expresses sorrow over the struggler's pain and expresses appreciation for the opportunity to resolve the problem.

- Address the struggler's pain.
 - "I am so sorry my actions hurt your feelings and caused you to feel betrayed."
- Applaud the struggler for approaching you.
- Appreciate being given a change to change your behavior in the future in order to improve your relationship.

"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." (Proverbs 25:11)

G. How to Respond to Difficult Personalities

The dispute presented to Solomon concerns two baby boys, one dead and one alive, and the conflicting testimonies of their prostitute mothers (1 Kings 3:22).

How is Solomon to know who is telling the truth and who is lying? There are no witnesses to testify. There is no evidence to introduce. There is no one to identify the baby boys. There is no way to know which baby belongs to which mother. The situation seems impossible to resolve as each mother continues to adamantly claim the living baby as her own.

The wisdom and discernment for which the king prayed is clearly being put to the test, and the resolution he introduces involves the living infant and a *sword* ...

*"The king said, 'This one says, "My son is alive and your son is dead," while that one says, "No! Your son is dead and mine is alive." ' Then the king said, 'Bring me a sword.' So they brought a sword for the king."
(1 Kings 3:23–24)*

Attackers Want to Feel Significant

- **Wolves Goal: To feel powerful**
 - Let them have their say without interrupting.
 - Get their attention with praise.
 - Hold your ground. (Match strength with strength.)
 - Avoid arguments.
 - Don't put yourself down.

“Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.” (2 Timothy 2:23)

- **Snakes Goal: To feel superior**
 - Be aware of their power to destroy.
 - Catch them in a lie.
 - Enlist someone to help you confront them in private.
 - Expect them to deny what they have done.
 - Don’t let them get away with an attack.

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he 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 he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” (Matthew 18:15–17)

- **Hornets Goal: To feel valuable**
 - Learn to cut off negative conversation.
 - Respond only to what is important.
 - Confront their game-playing.
 - Encourage a look at solutions.
 - Don’t reinforce their complaints.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Ephesians 4:29)

Avoiders Want to Feel Secure

- **Turtles Goal: To feel safe**
 - Ask questions that can’t be answered with *yes* or *no*.
 - Seek to get them to talk on the feeling level.
 - Hang in there until you get a response.
 - Be positive, not critical with them.
 - Don’t answer for them.

“A man is praised according to his wisdom, but men with warped minds are despised.” (Proverbs 12:8)

- **Chameleons Goal: To feel accepted**

- Make it “okay” to disagree.
- Help them identify priorities.
- Learn their hidden fears.
- Reinforce their decisions.
- Don’t accept their yes as complete agreement.

“An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.” (Proverbs 12:25)

- **Weasels Goal: To feel courage**

- Avoid accusations.
- Don’t get drawn into arguments.
- Be strong and immovable.
- Be forgiving.
- Be consistently encouraging.

“As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses ... in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.” (2 Corinthians 6:4, 7)

H. The Road to Resolution

Some resolutions to conflict are not quickly or easily found but require supernatural discernment and wisdom, as in the case of the two prostitutes who came before King Solomon.

Two women are claiming to be the mother of the same child. How does the king determine the truth? This is the dilemma before the king. The truth is needed in order to settle the conflict. In an attempt to get to the truth, Solomon calls for a sword. He will render a fair resolution. The baby is to be cut in half and equally divided between the two women.

The king’s strategy works, the true mother cries out that the baby not be killed but be given to the other woman. Conversely, the other woman agrees with the king’s fair resolution that neither would have the living child. Thus the truth is revealed and the king’s verdict is that the baby be given to his mother, the woman who was willing to give him up in order to save his life.

“He then gave an order: ‘Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.’ The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her son and said to the king, ‘Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!’ But the other said, ‘Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!’ Then the king gave his ruling: ‘Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother.’ ”

(1 Kings 3:25–27)

As you prepare to walk the road to resolution of a conflict, remember to ...

- **Pledge** your commitment.

- “I am committed to this relationship.”
- “I am committed to reconciliation, if at all possible.”

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18)

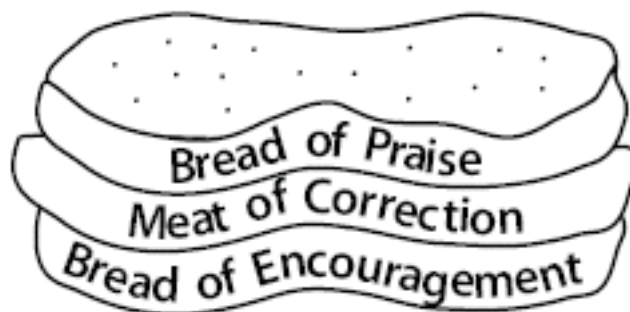
- **Pray** for yourself.

- Am I seeing the true issue?”
- “Reveal any personal error I need to face.”
- “Prepare the heart of to be open.”

“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)

- **Prepare** before you ask for a meeting.

- Discern the root cause of the conflict.
- Examine your expectations.
- Decide on positive solutions.



- Use the “Sandwich Technique.”

“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.” (Lamentations 3:40)

- **Propose** a time to talk face-to-face.
 - “I care about our relationship. Is it possible for us to have some time to talk?”
 - “I feel there are some unresolved issues that need to be dealt with positively.”

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:3)

- **Provide** a private place.
 - Away from people
 - Away from distractions

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” (Matthew 18:15)

- **Purpose** to be honest.
 - Take responsibility for your actions.
 - See the other person’s viewpoint.

“A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies.” (Proverbs 12:17)

- **Permit** total forgiveness.
 - Choose to forgive any hurts.
 - Don’t mentally rehearse the faults of the other.
 - Allow God to reestablish a bond of love.

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” (Colossians 3:13–14)

- **Perceive** a future harvest.
 - You are sowing seeds that may not take root until later.
 - Change is a process.
 - What you sow, you reap!

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9)

- **Present** the present conflict.
 - Don’t bring up the past.
 - Keep the conversation on the present conflict.

“[Love] ... does not take into account a wrong suffered.” (1 Corinthians 13:5 NASB)

- **Promote** fairness and objectivity.
 - Avoid generalizations.
 - Mention both positives *and* negatives.

“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.” (Leviticus 19:15)

- **Protect** one another’s privacy.
 - Don’t involve outsiders.
 - Control your tongue when you are with other people.

“A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.” (Proverbs 11:13)

- **Preserve** individuality.
 - Value differences in goals, desires, and priorities.
 - Don’t demand like-thinking.

“I too will have my say; I too will tell what I know.” (Job 32:17)

- **Project** openness and optimism.
 - Exhibit positive body language.
 - Use “I” statements and make good eye contact.

“Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

- **Practice** love.
 - End with an appropriate physical expression: firm handshake, hug, or a pat on the back.
 - Express appreciation, care, and love.

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” (Proverbs 17:17)

I. Why Should I Forgive When the Conflict Is Not Resolved?

Forgiveness is not contingent on resolution, nor is it based on feelings. Forgiveness is a choice—a choice to do what God tells you to do. Realize that when Jesus was being crucified on the cross, He said,

*“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”
(Luke 23:34)*

He knew they hadn’t changed. If you don’t forgive, you will develop a root of bitterness and a bitter root will grow bitter fruit.... You will become bitter.

Most important of all, you are to forgive because God says so.

*“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”
(Colossians 3:13)*

How to Handle “The Hook”

- Imagine right now a hook attached to your collarbone. And imagine all the pain attached to the hook that is a result of the wrong that was done to you.
- Ask yourself, *Do I really want to carry all this pain with me for the rest of my life?* The Lord wants you to take the pain from the past and release it into His hands.
- Then take the offender off of your emotional hook and place that person onto God’s hook. The Lord knows how to deal with your offender. He says,

*“It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.”
(Deuteronomy 32:35)*

Prayer to Forgive Your Offender

“Lord Jesus, thank You for caring about how much my heart has been hurt. You know the pain I have felt because of . Right now I release all that pain into Your hands. Thank You, Lord, for dying on the cross for me and extending Your forgiveness to me. As an act of my will, I choose to forgive . Right now, I take him off of my emotional hook, and I place him onto Your hook. I refuse all thoughts of revenge. I trust that in Your time and in Your way You will deal with him as You see fit. And Lord, thank You for giving me Your power to forgive so that I can be set free. In Your precious name I pray. Amen.”

J. How Do You Keep Forgiving Following a Major Conflict?

We may need to go through many bouts of forgiving. Forgiving again and again is just part of the **process of forgiveness**. As we consistently release each recurring thought of an offense, eventually the thoughts will stay away. The process will be complete.... The fight will be won. Jesus emphasized the “again and again” nature of forgiveness when He said,

“If he [your brother] sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”
(Luke 17:4)

How to *Forgive ... Again*

Forbid recurring thoughts of the wrongs to enter your mind. Stop them as soon as they occur. Boldly say to yourself, *I refuse to keep a record of this.... I refuse to keep a ledger.*

“[Love] keeps no record of wrongs.” (1 Corinthians 13:5)

Overcome the temptation to bring up the matter again. After there has been honest confrontation with the offender and both sides of the situation have been dealt with or if the other person refuses to talk about the problem, let the Holy Spirit do His work of conviction. Ecclesiastes 3:7 says, *“[There is] a time to be silent and a time to speak.”* Pray this passage ...

“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.” (Psalm 141:3)

Repeat Scripture in your mind. Allow God’s perspective to change your perspective. Allow God’s heart to permeate your heart. At times of testing, repeat over and over, “Love covers this wrong. Lord, may I be an expression of Your love. May I reflect Your love that covers over all wrongs.”

“Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.” (Proverbs 10:12)

Give the situation to God. Jesus understands how much you have been wronged. When He was being persecuted, Jesus knew that the heavenly Father would judge justly ... in His way, in His time. And you can know the same. Your trial will make you either bitter or better. Say to the Lord, “I put my heart into Your hands.... I entrust myself to You. I know You will judge this situation justly.” These words were said about Jesus ...

“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” (1 Peter 2:23)

Intercede on behalf of your offender. God does not present prayer as an option for you; it is a command. When you have been wronged, pray, “Lord, give me eyes to see him through Your eyes.... May I care for her with Your care....”

“Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” (Luke 6:28)

Value what you can give rather than what you can receive. Pray for God to help you understand the offender’s past and how his or her inner pain has contributed to the injury you are now experiencing. Focus on how you might meet some of these inner needs, for it is more blessed to give than to receive.

“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ” (Acts 20:35)

Extend God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Forgiveness is a direct expression of both God’s grace and God’s mercy. Grace is getting what you don’t deserve (pardon). Mercy is not getting what you do deserve (punishment). Pray often, “Lord, may my life be an expression of Your grace and an extension of Your mercy.”

“The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” (James 5:11)

K. What Will Protect Your Heart from Bitterness?

Following conflict, what keeps your heart from a negative focus? Jesus said, “*Love your enemies.*” Impossible! Unrealistic! No way! People *can’t* love their enemies ... at least that’s the assumption. Yet, the Greek word *agape*, translated “love” in this passage, by definition means “a commitment to seek the highest good of another person.” The “highest good” for those who are genuinely *wrong* is that their hearts become genuinely *right*. What can be one major catalyst for this change? Jesus provides the answer ...

*“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”
(Matthew 5:44)*

If you are saying, “but they really aren’t enemies,” realize that if someone evokes resentment, bitterness, or hatred, that person is an enemy to your spirit. Because praying for your enemy is commanded by Christ, believers should obey this directive and not regard this as optional. And because praying for your enemy protects your heart from bitterness, you should *want* to obey this directive in heart and in deed. One approach is to pray “the fruit of the Spirit” for your offender. And because you are willing to “bless” your enemy, the Bible says that you will inherit a blessing.

*“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”
(1 Peter 3:9)*

How to Pray for Those Who Hurt You

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”
(Galatians 5:22–23)*

- “**Lord**, I pray that will be filled with **the fruit of love** by becoming fully aware of Your unconditional **love**—and in turn will be able to **love** others.
- “**Lord**, I pray that will be filled with **the fruit of joy** because of experiencing Your steady **joy**—and in turn will radiate that inner **joy** to others.
- “**Lord**, I pray that will be filled with **the fruit of peace**—Your inner **peace**—and in turn will have a **peace** that passes all understanding toward others.
- “**Lord**, I pray that will be filled with **the fruit of patience** because of experiencing Your **patience**—and in turn will extend that same extraordinary **patience** to others.
- “**Lord**, I pray that will be filled with **the fruit of kindness** because of experiencing Your **kindness**—and in turn will extend that same undeserved **kindness** to others.
- “**Lord**, I pray that will be filled with **the fruit of goodness** because of experiencing the genuine **goodness** of Jesus—and in turn will reflect the moral **goodness** of Jesus before others.
- “**Lord**, I pray that will be filled with **the fruit of faithfulness** because of realizing Your amazing **faithfulness**—and in turn will desire to be **faithful** to You, to Your Word, and to others.
- “**Lord**, I pray that will be filled with **the fruit of gentleness** because of experiencing Your **gentleness**—and in turn will be able to be **gentle** with others.
- “**Lord**, I pray that will be filled with **the fruit of self-control**—the **control of self** by Christ—and in turn will rely on His **control** for enablement to break out of bondage and to be an example before others.

In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.”

*“The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”
(James 3:17)*

L. Turning Foes into FRIENDS

F—Find ways to compliment your opposer.

- Look for and express positive character traits that your opposer possesses.
- Don't focus on complimentary externals such as clothes, hair, good looks.
- Express a sincere compliment at an appropriate time. "I've noticed (how effectively you spoke ... worked ... sang), and I really admire that."

"The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just." (Psalm 37:30)

R—Repay evil with good toward your opposer.

- Look for and extend acts of kindness.
- Commit to God that you will not act negatively like your opposer.
- Do not talk about your opposer in a demeaning way to others.

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody." (Romans 12:17)

I—Intercede in prayer for your opposer.

- Ask God to reveal your opposer's real needs.
- Seek the Lord's perspective on the differences between you and your opposer.
- Commit to praying for your opposer every time that person comes to mind.

"Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right." (1 Samuel 12:23)

E—Empathize with your opposer.

- Learn about the past hurts and hardships your opposer has experienced.
- Get in touch with your feelings as you think about your own hurts and hardships.
- Allow yourself to feel compassion as you identify with your opposer.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." (Romans 12:15)

N—Nurture a forgiving heart toward your opposer.

- Realize that you were once a sinner without the love of the Lord.
- Imagine what life was like before you were a true believer.

- Pray for God to give you a willingness to forgive just as He was willing to forgive you.

“When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” (Mark 11:25)

D—Decide to love your opposer.

- See yourself as a conduit of God’s love.
- Look for tangible ways to express love on a continual basis.
- Keep focusing on “What is in the best interest of my opposer” ... and then do it.

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” (Romans 13:8)

S—Seek to meet the needs of your opposer.

- Reach out—look for what is especially meaningful to your opposer (such as reaching out to one of that person’s loved ones).
- Reach out—invite your opposer to attend an event with you that you know that person would like.
- Reach out—take food to your opposer when you hear that person is sick or has lost a loved one.

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” (Romans 12:20)

**When you are faced with conflict, passivity is not the real path to peace.
Resolution rests in confronting wrong, but with a right heart.**

—June

Answers to Questions

Who Displays Which Style of Conflict in Scripture?

Eve: She is an avoider, a weasel.... She tried to weasel out of accepting responsibility for her wrong choices by blaming the serpent.

Cain: He is an attacker, a wolf.... He became angry when God chastised him regarding his offering.

The Philistines: They are attackers, wolves.... They were predators waiting to conquer their prey.

Delilah: She is an attacker, a snake.... She accepted a bribe from the Philistines to trap Samson.

Samson: He is an avoider, a chameleon.... He told the secret of his strength just to please Delilah.

King Saul: He is an attacker, a wolf.... He was jealous of David.

King David: He is an avoider, a turtle.... He sought to keep his affair with Bathsheba a secret from her husband, Uriah.

The Pharisees: They are attackers, snakes.... They sought to control everyone with laws. They accused Jesus of blasphemy.

Pilate: He is an avoider, a chameleon.... He knew that Jesus was innocent, yet condemned Him to death because the crowd insisted that Jesus be crucified.

Judas: He is an attacker, a snake.... He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Martha: She is an attacker, a hornet.... She complained to Jesus about her sister Mary.

Peter: He is an avoider, a turtle.... He denied ever knowing Jesus.

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