

CONFRONTING CONFRONTATION

Introduction

Experts are reporting that extended time sheltering in place can lead to an increase in domestic conflicts. Contentious political debate about the proper response, media's pointed and sometimes controversial commentary, and emotionally unchecked personal reactions and opinions all kindle conflict. Uncertainty, fear, information overload, and restrictive mandates are a breeding ground for stress in our relationships—whether in the home, with our neighbors (even at acceptable social distance), or on social media. Conflict produces “heartache [that] crushes the spirit” (Proverbs 15:13). In this broken world, conflict is inevitable. At the moment, it may be more likely or more frequent. So how do we deal with it? How do we head it off in the first place? The answer, as always, is found only in the powerful and restorative Word of our loving God.

Devotion

Let's step back from our private battlefields for a moment to try to understand why we are not more eager to snuff out conflicts while they are still in the formative stage. The voice of our instructor is that of the apostle James, the author of a New Testament letter meant for all Christians, past and present. He had plenty of experience with conflict.

To begin, James poses a rhetorical question: “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” His answer: “Don't [fights and quarrels] come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (James 4:1-3).

When it comes to describing what goes on in the privacy of my heart, James is spot on. *I'm the problem.* While I can't read your heart, I'm guessing you're nodding in agreement. We are capable of entertaining evil ideas and catering to selfish desires. But the case James is making goes beyond pointing out that we're all sinners. His point is that it's our own sin-driven *wanting* that actually generates our conflicts. That explains why we're not interested in quelling a growing conflict while the tension is still building. That would mean forfeiting our agenda, which would be counterproductive. Our sinful nature prefers to remain locked on a course that pushes for having things our way.

So powerful is this selfish yearning that it holds us (and all the rest of the world) captive (Titus 3:3), leaving us vulnerable to the temptations associated with conflict. Nor will we be the last generation to have to endure this terrible curse. The swirling cyclonic whirlpool that revolves around wanting and drags us down into conflict is destined to repeat itself until the end of time (Matthew 24:6). Our children and grandchildren will have to deal with it, just as we have.

We've already explored the blessings a reconciliation strategy can bring to a broken relationship.* We know its potential for healing an unhealthy relationship, moving bitter enemies to accept one another as equals, and restoring peace where conflict and hatred have been the norm. All major miracles! But the story gets even better. Reconciliation is so profoundly effective because the change dynamic for reconciliation is forgiveness. And forgiveness is the only power on earth able to change a human heart.** That puts reconciliation at the top of the greatest miracles of all time. A change of heart is incredibly wonderful because you and I lack the resources needed to turn useless, self-centered hearts into hearts that genuinely care about others. On our own, we're doomed to lifetimes of selfish whims, consumed by obsessive wanting, and enslaved to sinful desires. Only God has the power to change all that, making new people of us. Through the pen of his prophet Ezekiel, God promised, “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19).

This is very good news for people embroiled in conflict. Having new hearts changes everything. Our new hearts no longer obsess over *my way, my needs, my stuff, my influence, my turf, my agenda, my views, my legacy.* They give us a new and different way of seeing others, especially our enemies. We now care about every relationship because every relationship presents another opportunity to give of ourselves, even as Christ Jesus gave himself for us. Hearts once

stone-cold dead now beat to the life-giving rhythm of God’s will, no longer slaves to the self-serving *wanting* that leads to conflict.

*A previous devotion in this resource discusses this concept.

**A change borne of the forgiveness we have in Christ. See Colossians 3:1-14, especially vs. 13.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, turn my heart of stone into a heart of living flesh that lives to do your will by loving others, even my enemies. Amen.

—from [Devotional Thoughts for Christians in Conflict](#)

Lord Jesus, teach me to love others as you have loved me. Help me be more patient and alert to the needs of others and always ready to serve them with the gifts you have given me. Amen.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you set those who are lonely in families. We commend to your care all the homes in which your people live. Keep them free from bitterness, pride, and selfishness. Fill them with faith, wisdom, patience, and godliness. Let children and parents show respect for one another, and bless us all with a spirit of kindness and true affection. Amen.

Lord Jesus, you are the Prince of peace. By your life, death, and resurrection, you earned for us peace with God. In a restless and turbulent world, enable us who know your peace to be peacemakers. Help us by word and example to promote harmony in our homes, workplaces, churches, schools, and wherever you place us in life. Amen.

—from [There’s a Prayer for That](#)

Hymn-Sing

Just As I Am, without One Plea (CW 397)

[PDF](#), [Organ accompaniment](#), [Piano accompaniment](#)

Oh, that the Lord Would Guide My Ways (CW 462)

[PDF](#), [Organ accompaniment](#), [Piano accompaniment](#)

Children’s Activities

Learn about how [Stephen fixed his eyes on Jesus as he faced the harshest conflict](#).

Go deeper and have some fun with these [related activities](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Navigating Christian Conflict: [A Heart at Peace](#)

Navigating Marriage Conflict: [Growing Together in Christ](#)

Navigating Parent-Child Relationships: [Patient Parenting](#); [Look Up from Your Phone](#)

Prayers for Relationships (and much more!): [There’s a Prayer for That](#)

Devotionals: [My 180: Loving God More](#) (love for others stems from the deep love of God and for God); [364 Days of Thanksgiving](#) (grow in appreciation all the blessings God so graciously give us—especially our relationships)