

Bible Study: The Ministry of Reconciliation

Topic: Biblical Conflict Resolution

Key Texts: 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Matthew 18:15-17, Romans 12:18

Introduction for the Leader

- **The Problem:** When conflict happens, our natural human instinct is usually "Fight" (attack, gossip, retaliate) or "Flight" (avoid, withdraw, hold a silent grudge).
- **The Christian Distinctive:** Jesus teaches us a third option: **Pursue.** We are called to move *toward* the mess to heal it.
- **Key Definition:**
 - **Peacekeeping** is avoiding conflict to keep things quiet (sweeping it under the rug).
 - **Peacemaking** is addressing conflict to create true restoration (lifting the rug and cleaning the dirt).

Part 1: The Motivation (Why bother?)

Objective: To anchor our behavior in the gospel. We resolve conflict not just to be nice, but because we are ambassadors of a God who resolved His conflict with *us*.

Scripture Reading:

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that 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. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors..." — **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**

Commentary: Paul reminds us that we were once enemies of God. God didn't wait for us to apologize; He took the initiative to reconcile through the cross. Because we have received this "Ministry of Reconciliation," we lose the right to hold grudges. You cannot be a recipient of Grace and a hoarder of Grace at the same time. When we are in a conflict, we are "Ambassadors." An ambassador does not represent their own feelings; they represent the King.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it easier to hold a grudge than to initiate a conversation?
2. Verse 19 says God was "not counting people's sins against them." How does keeping a mental "scorecard" of what someone did to you damage a relationship?
3. If we are Christ's ambassadors in the middle of an argument, how should that change our tone of voice and our goal?

Part 2: The Method (How do I do it?)

Objective: To learn the practical, step-by-step process Jesus gave us for handling personal offenses.

Scripture Reading:

"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..." — Matthew 18:15-16

Commentary: Jesus gives a command that is very hard for modern culture: **Go to the person directly and privately.**

- **Don't** go to Facebook.
- **Don't** go to your best friend to "vent" (which is often just gossip disguised as a prayer request).
- **Don't** wait for them to come to you.

The text says, "Go and point out their fault, just between the two of you." The goal is explicitly stated: "You have won them over." The goal isn't to win the argument; the goal is to win the *brother*. Privacy protects the other person's reputation, which makes it easier for them to listen without being defensive.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is "just between the two of you" so important? What happens when we involve a third party too early?
2. Have you ever had someone come to you privately to resolve an issue? How did you react?
3. How do we differentiate between "pointing out a fault" in love versus just criticizing someone?

Notes:

Part 3: The Margin (What if it doesn't work?)

Objective: To release the burden of fixing everyone. We are responsible for the *invitation* to peace, not the *acceptance* of it.

Scripture Reading:

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." — **Romans 12:18**

Commentary: Paul adds two crucial caveats here: "If it is possible" and "as far as it depends on you." This implies that sometimes, peace is *not* possible because the other person refuses to participate. Biblical reconciliation requires two people, but Biblical forgiveness only requires one. You can forgive someone (release the debt) even if they never apologize, but you cannot have a reconciled relationship until they own their part. Romans 12:18 teaches us to do our part so thoroughly that if the relationship stays broken, it is entirely because of the other side.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does "as far as it depends on you" look like practically? When can you say, "I've done my part"?
2. How do we handle the pain when we try to reconcile, but the other person rejects us?
3. Is there a difference between "forgiving" someone and "trusting" them again? (Note: Forgiveness is instant/commanded; trust is rebuilt over time).

Notes:

Application: The Empty Chair

Leader's Closing Challenge: "Think of a relationship in your life that is currently fractured—a friend, a family member, a coworker.

1. Have you gone to them **privately** (Matthew 18)?
2. Are you acting as an **ambassador** of Jesus, or an ambassador of your own hurt feelings (2 Cor 5)?
3. Have you done everything that **depends on you** (Romans 12)?

We cannot force them to change. But we can obey God by making the first move. Let's pray for the courage to make that phone call or send that text this week."

Handout Summary for the Group

(Optional: Write these points on a whiteboard)

The 3 Rules of Biblical Conflict:

1. **The Goal is Restoration, not Victory.** (Win the person, not the fight).
2. **The Circle is Small.** (Keep it private. Gossip kills reconciliation).
3. **The Initiative is Yours.** (Don't wait for an apology. Jesus didn't wait for us).