



Praying for Conflict Resolution

John 17:15-23
Philippians 4:2-7

~ Ricki Lee Brooks

This handy ebook is Chapter One of Ricki's book, "Let's Stop The Fighting."

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Let's Stop the Fighting
Published by Sound Communication
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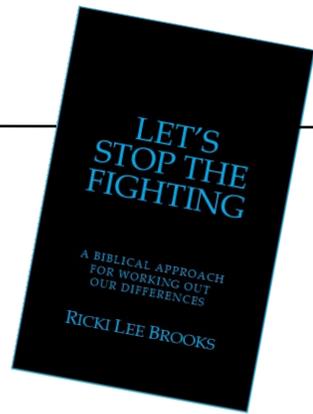
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We recently read about an exasperated mom who sent her disobedient little boy to his room. When his time was up, he came out far more confident than when he had gone in.

He said, "I've been thinking about what I did and I said a prayer."

"That's fine," his mother said, "if you ask God to make you good, he will help you."

"Oh, I didn't ask him to help me be good," replied the boy. "I asked him to help you put up with me."

We found that little gem by reading through a list of quotes and anecdotes. Here's another...

It seems a little guy was attending church with his family when a flash of insight concerning prayer and conflict resolution suddenly came over him. Here's how the storyteller related the incident:

"We watched an especially verbal and boisterous child being hurried out, slung under his irate father's arm. No one in the congregation so much as raised an eyebrow—until the child captured everyone's attention by crying out in a charming Southern accent, 'Ya'll pray for me now!'"

We laugh because we totally get it.

It seems all of us want to pray, "God there's some conflict here! Help me get the best of it!"

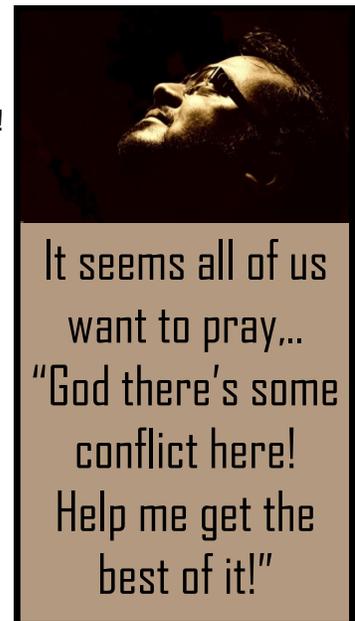
It makes sense since the requests are coming from the hearts of children. However, what makes sense for children should not be so sensible for mature adults. Instead, we will be far better served if we listen to the advice of two other selections we found in the same list...

First, William Law said, "There is nothing that makes us love a man so much as prayer for him." One has to wonder, "Why doesn't that choice bit of wisdom not pop up more often when people are held in the clutches of conflict?"

Second, President Lincoln said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me seemed insufficient for the day." Considering the greatness of this hero and the enormity of the conflict he dealt with, once again, we need to ask, "Why are more of us not following his example?"

It seems logical that we would. However, like the children in the above anecdotes and unlike the advice in the quotes from Mr. Law and Mr. Lincoln, most people, if they think to pray at all during times of conflict, pray for themselves. They pray for victory. They pray for personal advantage. The Bible, however, leads us another direction.

So how should we pray when faced with conflict? Well, in a few moments, we'll get some real nitty-gritty, moment by moment advice as we investigate the conflict resolution model the Apostle Paul gave the two church ladies, Euodia and Syntyche, in Philippians 4:2-7. However, before that, let's first consider why we should pray for conflict resolution.



Ever wonder why church buildings are so often more empty than not? Brian Noble, Executive Director of Peace Maker Ministries, offers this four part summary:



1. Born again Christians in the U.S. file 4 to 8 million lawsuits every year, often against other Christians, costing 20 to 40 billion dollars.

2. There are approximately 19,000 major, scarring church conflicts in the U.S. each year (an average of 50 per day).

3. 32% of born again Christians who have been

married have gone through a divorce, virtually the same percentage as our general population.

4. 1500 pastors leave their assignments every month in the U.S. because of conflict, burnout, or moral failure, costing the church at least \$684 million each year.

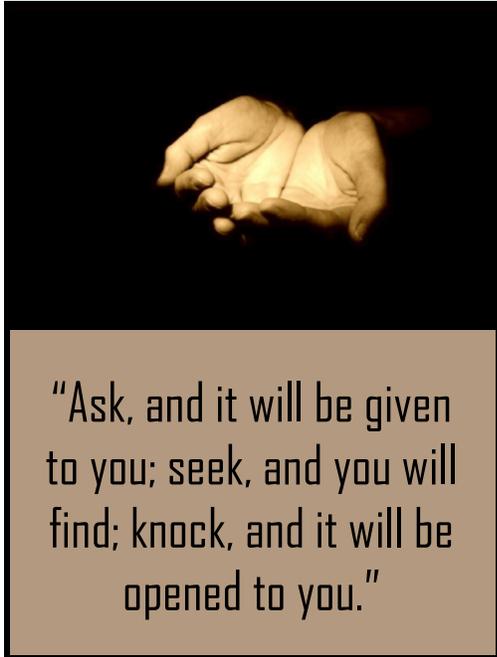
peacemaker.net/project/the-high-cost-of-conflict-among-christians

Why We Should Pray for Conflict Resolution

Where better to look for an answer to the why question than the Lord Jesus himself. In chapter seventeen of his gospel, the Apostle John recorded the words of Jesus when the Lord prayed to the Father in anticipation of the crucifixion. Notice a part of what he prayed (John 17:13-15):

I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

Did you pay attention? Look at the last two sentences again: *I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.* Praying on behalf of the apostles, Jesus said the world would hate them. Yet, he did not ask that they be removed from that hatred. He did not ask God to knock-out those who would generate and extend that hatred. Instead, he simply prayed they be protected from the evil one. In the face of hatred and conflict, Jesus simply wanted the apostles to avoid giving in to Satan.



"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

If this were the end of his prayer it would be sufficient, but there is more. What Jesus desired for the apostles, he wants for all believers. In verse twenty, Jesus prayed, *My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.*

Whoa! Jesus prayed for all of us! Elsewhere Jesus said, *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened (Matthew 7:7,8).* Think about this...if Jesus tells us to ask for something, with every expectation that we will receive it, how much more likely is it we will receive the very thing he wants for us when we ask for it? Very, very, very likely! Who needs more motivation than this to include prayer in every strategy and tactic for conflict resolution?

And...however...also...but...he did not finish with this prayer for protection. He went on. So, let's see where his prayer went (John 17:20-23):

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

When Jesus prayed for us, he prayed specifically that we be a people united, not divided. In fact, his words were quite explicit: *May they be brought to complete unity.* But why? The answer came in his next breath: *to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

The product of unity is what Francis Schaeffer called "The Final Apologetic." In his book, "The Mark of the Christian," Schaeffer argued that the best form of evangelism was for Christians to get along. His point must not go unheeded: continual, persistent, unresolved conflict between Christians has the exact opposite impact on the world from what God desires. Here's part of what Schaeffer wrote, "...we cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians."* This is exactly why Jesus prayed as he did. The Lord indicated that two things would occur as a result of Christian unity: first, unbelievers would believe our claims that God the Father sent God the Son; and, second, unbelievers would believe that God the Father loves us as much as he loves his One and Only Son.

Now if this is true, the opposite is also true. If we allow conflict to divide us, if we allow disunity to be the hallmark of who we are, the world will not believe God the Father sent God the Son and the world will not believe that God loves us. They will be wrong, but they will have arrived at a reasonable conclusion. It will be reasonable to them, because we—through our lack of agenda harmony—will have given them every reason to believe just the opposite of the truth. If and when we allow conflict to tear us apart, we also destroy our effectiveness as ambassadors for Christ.

*Schaeffer, F.A. The Mark of a Christian: Vol. 4 of "The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer, A Christian Worldview." Crossway Books; Westchester, Illinois; 1982, p. 189.

What does this teach us about prayer and conflict resolution? Well, at the very least, it teaches us that whenever we face conflict our motivation to pray should stem from a hope that in all we say and do we will not destroy our testimony.

Two things, therefore, stand out:

- **we should pray that everyone involved with the conflict will be protected from the evil one;**
- **and we should pray that unity will be of greater value to everyone involved than our personal differences.**

Think about it. You are faced with conflict. You now have a choice.

You can react without thinking.

If you do, you will not pray. You will engage your opponent in your own strength. When you do, you will be susceptible to the evil one...and your conflict may very well blow up in your face. Your testimony will be damaged. If there are unbelievers involved or observing you will jeopardize their opportunity for seeing the truth about God.

You can wait to respond.

If you do, you may think to pray. When you pray you can ask God to protect you from the influence of the evil one. You can ask God to help you value your relationship more than the issue causing conflict. And you can ask God to help you negotiate this conflict in a way that maintains your testimony.

Think about it. How would this change the patterns between a husband and wife? How would this alter the many disputes found within church congregations? How would this impact the negotiations between co-workers? How would this counter the tension between management and labor? That's motivation.

How We Should Pray For Conflict Resolution

Now how do we take this motivation to pray for conflict resolution and translate it into everyday practice? Well for that, let's get to the Church Ladies. Their names are Euodia and Syntyche. They can be found in Philippians 4:2-7. Here's what the Apostle Paul wrote:

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

At this point a little background information is necessary.

The Church in Philippi was a strong church. Paul had some great things to say about them. He said they were his partners in spreading the life-changing message of Jesus Christ (1:3-5). He

thanked them for financially investing in the ministry of his missionary journeys (4:10-14). He also indicated that there were times when they alone supported his work when no other churches would share the burden (4:15,16).

Now mind you, even though they were a great church, they were not perfect. Problems had infiltrated the church. And, while we cannot be entirely sure what those problems were, we do know that Paul was concerned enough to write to the church about the need for unity, agenda harmony, and conflict resolution. In his opening prayer he prayed they would be able to know what was really important (1:9,10). He urged them to be like-minded, one in spirit, and one in purpose (2:1-4). He told them they needed to develop an attitude like that of Jesus: personal humility rather than personal pride (2:5-11).

What's more, he asked them to work out their problems. In fact, he asked them to approach problem solving within their relationships without bickering, complaining, arguing, or murmuring (2:12-18).

Throughout his letter to the Church in Philippi, Paul provided many principles for building great relationships and resolving conflict. As he started to wind things down, he addressed the two church ladies and their problem. Apparently, their conflict—if not at the heart of the Philippian problem—weighed on his heart enough to prompt his direct intervention. In the process, the Spirit of God used Paul to teach the Philippians five lessons on how to change their behavior before interpersonal problems threatened to do long-term damage. The first four dealt with how people should respond to one another in the middle of conflict. The fifth dealt with how people should pray in the middle of conflict crisis. Let's look quickly at the first four before we develop the fifth.

The first lesson came as he wrote *I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord*. The little phrase *agree with each other in the Lord* is translated by J.B. Phillips in *The New Testament in Modern English* as *to make up your differences as Christians should*. This clearly renders the meaning of Paul's plea. If the church ladies were going to get past their conflict they would have to work through their differences for the sake of their devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. This demands that true Christian character win out over pride.

The second lesson followed immediately as Paul wrote: *Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life*. Paul recognized that Euodia and Syntyche might need some help with their conflict resolution, so he called upon someone he referred to as his *loyal yokefellow* to help them.

The third lesson is found in the next two sentences: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* Paul wanted the church ladies to remember their common roots. So smack in the middle of this whole thing he reminded them about the need to rejoice in the Lord. While they may have been in no particular mood to celebrate one another, they could take joy in their relationship to Jesus Christ. Paul wanted them to see that it should come as no surprise that neither of them was perfect. Problems could be expected. They had been in need of a Savior after all.

The fourth lesson had to do with being gracious. Paul wrote: *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near*. The word behind *gentleness* has also been translated as forbearance, fairness, graciousness, considerateness, and magnanimity. Consider the definitions for the last two:

Considerateness: thoughtfulness concerning the rights and feelings of others.

Magnanimity: loftiness of spirit enabling one to bear trouble calmly, to disdain meanness and revenge, and to make sacrifices for worthy ends

The point could not be more clear: instead of fighting, Euodia and Syntyche needed to exhibit *gentleness* to one another.

Having given Euodia, Syntyche, Loyal Yokefellow, and the entire church four valuable lessons on how to behave toward one another in the middle of conflict, Paul turned his attention to prayer. In essence he wanted them to know that if their behavior was going to rise above personal differences they would need to trust God about everything—including one another and one another's issues. Here's what he wrote: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*

How is it that Paul could command people involved with interpersonal conflict *to not be anxious about anything*? How is such a thing even possible? Are we supposed to be able to turn our emotions on and off at a whim? The answer came in what Paul wrote next: *but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God*. Paul could tell them not to be anxious, because he knew—should they choose to take the option—that they possessed immediate access to God through prayer...and God could certainly calm their troubled hearts.

Now stop for a moment. Do not take this for granted. This is not Christianity 101. This is not simple religion. Instead, this is an all-out, in your face reality check on the nature of our relationship with God. Does he or does he not have the ability to help us with our conflicts? Will he go before us or will he leave us with our own feeble abilities? Can he...will he change our attitudes or are we doomed to live with the anxiety we experience in the middle of conflict?

The Apostle Paul had no doubt about this. He wanted Euodia and Syntyche to have no doubts. And, of course, through the words of the Apostle Paul, God is teaching us that we should have no doubts. When faced with conflict much of the battle can and should be met through prayer.

Still, we can ask how? How should we pray when faced with conflict? Well, consider the very words Paul used when talking about our conversation with God:

Prayer: a general term for simply expressing ourselves to God

Petition: a general term for asking something of God

Thanksgiving: that which demonstrates our awareness of and gratefulness for God's love, faith and good-will toward us

Requests: the specific items of our petitions

These words describe and define a true conversation with God. They have nothing to do with repetitive rituals. They have nothing to do with some crazy form of wish fulfillment. Instead, they describe and define honest interaction between us and the one who created us. He is a person. We are persons. He is relational. We are relational. He is large and in charge. We are not. He can change hearts. We need him to change ours.

However, Paul had specific intentions when he wrote: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* What anxiety was Paul referring to? The context makes it clear: the anxiety that existed within Euodia and Syntyche—and probably the entire church—on account of their personal squabbles. So what would be the primary focus of these prayer efforts? The answer is not too difficult. In fact, let's flesh it out by putting some words in the Apostle's mouth:

“Euodia, instead of being anxious where Syntyche is concerned, would you please pray about your situation with her? And, Syntyche, I need to ask the same of you. Ladies, talk to God about your problem before you talk to others. In fact, talk to God before you talk with one another. Even more so, don't just talk to him...get specific. Ask God to help you have the mind of Christ, to be loving, and to be done with pride (lesson #1). Ask God to give you a third party who might be able to mediate the trouble between you and your one time coworker (lesson #2). Ask God to keep Jesus on your mind and in your heart. If you cannot find joy in one another right now, let your joy in Christ rule all that you do and all that you say (lesson #3). Ask God for the strength to be gentle toward one another, to forbear with one another, to extend graciousness to one another (lesson #4) Ask God to ease your anxiety. And don't stop with your petitions, remember to give thanks. Syntyche, surely there is much that you can thank God about concerning Euodia. Euodia, the same applies to you where Syntyche is concerned. Thank God for the ministry you accomplished together in the past. Thank God that he saw fit to save the other person from her sins. Thank God that he created the other person in his image. Thank God that your sister in Christ will inherit all the blessings of heaven. Ladies, if you will pray about your situation, if you will give thanks for one another, then the peace of God will prevent you from making matters worse. He will guard your hearts. He will give you peace where you thought you would only know anxiety.”

Can you imagine what might have happened to the conflict resolution process if both the church ladies followed through on this kind of prayer? Can you imagine what will happen if you and those you relate to determine to pray like this if and when you are faced with conflict?

Think about it. The ragged edge that usually accompanies conflict will be smoothed out when we determine to pray for our conflict partner rather than protesting against his or her opinions, comments, and/or actions.

Think about it. The goal of getting back on track with a conflict partner will arrive much sooner if we determine to talk with God about our situation before we go off talking to others about him or her.

Think about it. If we break this down even further, how much better would agenda harmony be if we went even deeper in our prayers and began to thank God for the good things we know to be true about our conflict partner before we began fixating on his or her problems?



Oh Abba, forgive me. Long have my sister and I labored together for you. And now we squabble...hurtful things we have said to one another. Help me Lord Jesus to be more like you and less like the hauntings of my past. Relieve my anxiety, my jealousy, and my petty anger. Thank you for my sister. She is your child. You love her. I love her. Help me to get back to showing it. Amen.

Well, Paul made it quite clear how much better it could be when he wrote, *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. Where conflict exists between two or more people, it can be replaced by true peace. Where anxiousness rules the hearts and minds of those involved with conflict, it can be replaced by the *peace of God* to guard those hearts and minds.

Asking God for help can facilitate rapid and powerful healing in conflict situations. Troubled relationships can be mended. They can rediscover harmony since peace in a relationship marks the decline of insecurities and the increase of trust and loyalty. There may well be differences, but those differences need not become wedges of separation. When we pray we do not redirect God, we redirect ourselves. We center ourselves in God's love (not personal pride). We focus ourselves on God's glory (not our egos). We accommodate ourselves to God's will (not our desires). We mobilize ourselves for God's mission (not our agendas). We equip ourselves with God's word (not our opinions). We keep ourselves in God's providence (not our carelessness).

On the other hand, reacting to conflict without God's help can escalate the problem. We may move from an uneasy feeling to pinpointing a fault in another. If we let ourselves get sucked in, we'll begin to focus on the person rather than the issue. Once this occurs, it becomes a contest we feel we must win. If we do not, it means we were wrong and the other person is vindicated. Now we can't have that, can we? In order to win we resort to undermining the other person's character. All the while our conflict partner has probably been going through the same process of escalation.

Next we each begin the process of saving face. We begin to protect ourselves by forming alliances. We need to rope others in as though sheer numbers will demonstrate the depth of "bad and wrong" in the person with whom we're experiencing conflict. We also need to split the other person's alliances. So we go out of our way to establish ties to his or her "teammates" in order to erode any popular support he or she may possess. Finally, since the other person will simply not relent or repent, we determine they are unworthy and, therefore, must be let go.

The relationship is finally destroyed. Both our conflict partner and we are greatly diminished. We will move forward in life, but the scars will never go away. Suspicion will now invade most of our relationships. Trust will always be just a little harder to come by. Giving loyalty will be an uneasy proposition. As children of God, our faith will be hampered and our desire to give God public credit will wane. If this unresolved conflict involved a group of people, the organization will be damaged and discredited. Like an individual, it may continue, but its banner will never be quite so clean. Its corporate memory will be cloudy. Its present members will walk on eggshells. Its new members will sense that something is not quite right. In the end, this scenario will be tragic...but it need not be like this.

If we will simply pray, we will give ourselves a huge advantage in resolving conflict. We can move on from there, but there is where we must start.

The About Page

About Sound Communication

Sound Communication is a division of West Sound Community Church. It exists to help extend our ministry beyond our geographical location. At Sound Communication, we simply want to assist you with the skills you need to meet your unique challenges. We also want to give you a three-fold promise. First, should we accept the mission of assisting you, we will give you the absolute best of all we are and all we have to offer. Second, we will not offer what we cannot reasonably accomplish. Therefore, you can always count on us for an honest assessment of both your dilemma and our "fit" on behalf of your dilemma. Third, anything you can purchase from Sound Communication in hard-copy you can also download for free.

About Ricki Lee Brooks

Jesus said fields all across the world are ready for the harvest. He wants as many as possible to hear his life-changing message...and, at Sound Communication, we can think of no greater privilege than being a part of a team that delivers that message. Believers since the first century have dedicated themselves to this task. The times in which we live are no different. Faithful messengers still proclaim God's great message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Ricki Lee Brooks is just one among many of those messengers.

Ricki is the father of three and grandfather of four. All three of his children are happily married.

His heart is to help others overcome adversity by learning to truly walk in the presence of the Savior. Many years of ministry have allowed this in the lives of both adults and the next generations. Throughout the years, the addition of speaking on behalf of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Community Abstinence and Relationship Education (CARE), camps, retreats, and ECOLA Bible School has been both a ministry blessing and benefit.

Over 35 years ago, he and his wife, Vanita, wrote down their mission statement for life. Here it is...

Our mission in life is to love our Lord, one another, and our children more and more every day and to help as many as possible to do the same thing.

Since then much has changed. His children walk with the Lord as they grow their own families. Many have heard the life-changing news of Jesus Christ and are falling more in love with the Savior. And, sadly, yet triumphantly, Vanita is now with the Lord. One might think the death of Ricki's beloved would change the mission statement. It has not. After losing Vanita at the hands of a drunk driver, Ricki has often said, "Without her, I feel less effective, but not less impassioned. Helping people love the Lord is the greatest privilege on earth."

Whether talking with an individual on a park bench, leading a small seminar, or speaking to a large audience...whether the topic is specific to an organization or general and universal to the human condition...Ricki knows people wrestle with similar issues—who am I, why am I here, is there more to life? Failing to answer these questions inevitably leads to SID (spiritual identity disorder). It pushes individuals into drift mode and organizations into corporate anomie. Facing this kind of adversity can be either a positive challenge or a negative pitfall for both individuals and organizations. Ricki's role is to help you toward the positive.



"God does this you know. He woos us. He draws us. He compels us to come close. We dance with fire. He calls "May I have the dance floor and will you join me?"
I often smile. Sometimes blush. And I dance across the floor." Ricki

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