

Conflict Resolution

26 February 2025, 2-530pm

Module Description

Conflict is inevitable in our post-Fall, pre-Glorification world. This class aims to equip students with a basic biblical framework to understand and engage conflicts in a godly loving way that won't undermine the gospel and our ministry.

Learning Goals

- To equip students with a biblical framework to understand the dynamics of interpersonal conflicts.
- To deepen students' awareness of their default conflict strategy.
- To introduce students to mediation and conflict resolution skills.

Required Reading (Before Class)

- C. John Miller, 'The Central Conflict: Belief or Unbelief' & 'Fear & Egocentricity Go Together' in *Letters from Miller: Heart of a Servant Leader* (P&R Publishing, 2004)
- Jeff Temple, [*Succinct Conflict Resolution*](#) by Biblical Counselling Coalition.
- David Powlison, [*Picturing the Heart of Conflict*](#) in JBC 16:1 (1997): 43-46
- Deepak Reju, [*Case Study on Marital Conflict: Steve & Stephanie*](#) in Every Christian Counsels: Marital Conflicts. (Consider how you will approach this Steve & Stephanie)

Optional/Recommended Reading

- Brian Noble, *The Path of a Peacemaker: Your Biblical Guide to Healthy Relationships, Conflict Resolution, and a Life of Peace* (Baker Books, 2019)
- Ken Sande & Kevin Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (Baker Books, 2011)
- *Resolving Conflict Christ's Way* by Robert D. Jones in JBC 19:1 (2000): 13-17.
- Eric Willis, *Sacred Conflict: Resolution Skills for Christ's Follower* (Westbow, 2018)
- Lane & Tripp, *Relationship: A Mess Worth Making* (New Growth Press, 2006)
- Aaron Sironi & Lauren Whitman, *Helping a Spouse Who Moves Against during Marital Conflict* in JBC 32:3 (2018): 12-34
- Aaron Sironi & Lauren Whitman, *Helping a Spouse Who Withdraws during Marital Conflict* in JBC 32:3 (2018): 12-34
- Midgley, *Conflict in Corinth: Surprising Way to Build Community* in JBC 28:2 (2014).
- David Powlison, *Getting to the Heart of Conflict* in JBC 16:1 (1997): 32-42
- Deepak Reju, [*Who Will Take the First Step? Godly Initiative during Nasty Conflicts*](#)

Response Paper

- Reflect on your default personal conflict strategy, and how you would bring your weakness before God for your growth and the good of others.
- Reflect on the way Miller sought to help resolve the conflict. What about Miller's approach that you are comfortable or not comfortable with? What would you have said or done?

**C. John Miller, *Letters from Jack Miller:*
The Heart of a Servant Leader (P&R Publishing, 2004)**

THE HEART OF A SERVANT LEADER

The Central Conflict: Belief or Unbelief

To a young man who is struggling in his relationship with his girlfriend and with how the elders at NLPC have tried to shepherd him through his struggle.



October, 1988

Dear Steve,

Warm greetings in the name of Christ!

Since I was away the previous Sunday and you were away this past Sunday, I did not get an opportunity to see you. My hope is that you were able to meet with George [a NLPC elder] for prayer. He is a brother who prays with real faith. I will also be contacting [a few other elders] to pray for you. I also have prayed for you. All these brothers will be praying for you with deep concern for you.

Were you able to get the sermon tape of Peter's [one of Jack's copastors at NLPC] that I recommended? One of the brothers in the church told me that particular sermon was a great help to him. He said, "I've just been full of myself and my problems, but what a relief to see that being full of myself can be cured by grace, because Christ had resisted temptation for me!" He went on to say how liberating it was to know that a spotless Christ has atoned for his sins of self-preoccupation and had defeated Satan's accusations against his conscience. He had fear and trembling knowing his weaknesses, but this brother had been taught by God that Jesus lives in us by His Spirit and can enable us to take a stand against evil.

When I am weak in myself, then I am strong in grace. It has taken me a lifetime to get a little knowledge of myself, and what I have has all come the hard way. When I come to the end of myself, then and often only then I want and receive grace to understand myself and people. I wish I had a heart that did not constantly need all the hard spots in it to be

1: LETTERS FROM JACK MILLER

crushed by steam-roller experiences.

But let me recall our conversation of a few weeks ago when you showed up at my study. Thanks for coming and sticking it out! Thanks too for forgiving me and the other elders for our many failings as shepherds. We always need lots of forgiveness and also your prayers. Our failure to help you at least proves one thing: we do not have the power to deliver you. No human being does.

Only Christ, only Christ, only Christ delivers.

It must also have been very difficult to wrestle with all the questions you and I were asking together. Believe me, I stress “together.” Just remember that all of us elders are weak and sinful; we are, with Paul, “chief of sinners.” Anyway, do you remember how you and I differed in our evaluation of you? It makes me smile to think about it. You saw yourself as too trusting, and I saw you as overly suspicious of people.

I didn’t mean to single you out as having a problem that we as leaders don’t also have. All I was doing was talking out of my experience of my own foolish way of doing things. I do not instinctively seek out people who may tell me what I do not want to hear about myself. We all have a frightening tendency to avoid and draw back from people of wisdom who really know us—at least to draw back when they may tell us something that threatens our image of our inner self as righteous.

So I am praying for myself—and for you—that we will not be afraid or suspicious of wise people. My plea for you is that you will seek out and listen to others. . . . [Here Jack mentions a few people that he would like Steve to talk with.]

I’d also like to share with you a few thoughts in this letter about God’s method of healing the life and the conscience. In your recent telephone call you mentioned you simply could not pray, calling God “father.” That must break your heart! Earlier I believe you spoke of your need to deal with the guilt which has clouded your life since you committed a particular sin. I believe you also mentioned that you struggled with

thinking negatively about other people and judging them. Is it possible that this negative chemistry relates to your inability to pray? Negativism kills praying or at least converts praying into a form of penance which is powerless with God.

Usually our negativism is rooted in our feeling superior to people and rejecting the government of God over our lives. This self-righteous pride leads us into deep disappointment with everyone, and how can we pray when we really don't like God's form of government and the way other sinners have treated us?

I think it's important that you know we all struggle with these humbling issues: burdens of guilt and a tendency to feel condemned and then to condemn and fight others in our hearts.

The Devil also gets involved. He is a hard-hitter and refuses to quit at the sound of the bell. He is a relentless accuser of the brethren, and wants us to accuse ourselves as hopeless cases and to do the same for others. Then we are inwardly condemned and inwardly condemning.

In your life the struggle also seems to me to take the form of fight and flight. Would you agree? Think about it. I have found the same thing in myself. A tendency to fight people or problems and then run away from them by seeking some quick form of relief or comfort—or just distancing myself from people. Another form of flight is just going from one counselor to another—or rejecting all spiritual guidance.

It appears to me that you have a fundamental choice: will you approach these struggles with belief or with unbelief?

This is the central conflict for you. Belief or unbelief. Life or death.

Which will it be?

Allied to that conflict is the struggle on your part to be honest. I believe I sense in you a desire for integrity. Well, the two battles go together. Where there is faith in Christ

: LETTERS FROM JACK MILLER

and the atoning power of His blood, there is the courage to be honest and to confess and forsake sins. Particular sins. Do you think perhaps that your inability to pray indicates that your conscience is troubled by something you may have suppressed?

Believe me, you didn't invent all this. I have learned this about myself: Where unbelief has been allowed to take over, then the name of the game is insincerity and self-deception.

I would commend to you a careful and constant reading of James 4 and Isaiah 53. The former passage deals with God and our evil desires; the latter passage presents the work of Christ which gives us the security to face up to the evil of our hearts without being destroyed by it.

Steve, we elders are so very concerned for you. Please heed our loving admonition. Get a heart for the gospel and the holiness which comes from the gospel. Then reckon—think, consider, know, yes, believe, that you are dead to sin and alive in Christ. Then present your members as weapons of your true and only Lord, to be used in His war with evil! Hate sin for His dear sake!

Pray that Christ will show you the Father and His love. Join that prayer with honesty in the following: no blame-shifting or excuse-making or defending yourself in your heart and with your tongue.

Go constantly to Christ; look to Christ, rely on Christ, think Christ; and as you do this, the blood of the Son of God will cleanse you of these sins. Be very specific in your confession of sins and claim a great promise like Isaiah 1:18. I know big sinners like me need big promises like this one! Actually, seeking out giant promises will lead to a giant faith!

Jesus loves you, and so do we who are your spiritual shepherds. Expect great things from Christ.

**C. John Miller, *Letters from Jack Miller:*
The Heart of a Servant Leader (P&R Publishing, 2004)**

THE HEART OF A SERVANT LEAD

Fear and Egocentricity Go Together

To a woman who Jack and Rose Marie met on the mission field. She struggles with paralyzing fear and angry outbursts.



November, 1988

Dear Mary,

Tomorrow we leave for home with hearts that are both glad and sad. It makes us happy to be returning to our dear family and church, but we are sorry to leave so many fine friends here. We have learned to love this country and pray for Christ to do a mighty work here.

Rose Marie and I have tender hearts toward you and the pains which you have undergone in your life. We are especially burdened to see Christ deliver you from your fears. Fear is a terrible master, and the devil uses it to blind us to the love of God in Christ and the goodness of God's sovereign rule.

But you know, there is an even more powerful cause of our enslavements. It is our unconscious pride. Let me explain.

When I was sick with cancer, sometimes things would go wrong, complications or bodily weaknesses breaking down my peace of mind. Fear would seem to get an iron grip on my emotions. It was very, very hard.

But I did learn something. It is that fear is rooted in our need to be in control of our lives. And sickness and death are such a threat to us because they threaten to undo our pretensions to be sovereign over our own lives.

Once I saw this truth I told my heavenly Father that my fears were deep and that they were rooted in my ego-centered pride. God loves the truth, Mary; there is no point in trying to hide the deep sins of our heart from Him. He knows it all anyway, but He does

ER: LETTERS FROM JACK MILLER

want us to acknowledge our sins and to fall from our thrones onto our faces before Him.

Mary, I marvel how God should love me so much that He would send His Son to atone for my sins and to dethrone me. But I have learned there is no security, only fear and dread on a shaky throne of pride.

How does this relate to your fear and disappointments? Please know that—

1. You can't run away from your fears. You must ask the Father to help you identify them and hand them over to Him.
2. You must ask God to give you the Spirit to understand yourself and how your fears are rooted in egocentric pride.
3. Then humble your heart and repent of your proud spirit, grieve over it, hate it, and despise it.
4. Then claim the blood of Christ as the sole basis for cleansing, relying on the promise of 1 John 1:7–2:2.

It appears to me that you will have trouble understanding the connection between ungovernable fears and egocentricity. This insight can only be understood by faith. By faith you need to see how any attempt by us to run our lives without humble submission to God puts us in a position of having to control the uncontrollable. Who really can control his or her own life?—the people in it?—the events, joyous and painful, that occur?—the deep disappointments when others do not meet our expectations?

Indeed, you can end up hating God for not being the guarantor of our own idea of our rights and prerogatives.

But, Mary, you must by faith recognize the painful and liberating truth that you are not God, but a creature made in God's image, a person with dignity, but nonetheless a very, very small being compared to the infinite Majesty of the Most High. I know that when God revealed Himself to me, I was stunned to discover that He was the all-glorious one

and that I was the most egocentric person who had ever lived. What helped me see this shocking truth about myself? It was His waking me up to the knowledge that my whole life was exclusively centered on my own glory, my own needs, and my own will.

It hurts me to have to say this, and I speak with all love in Christ. But it appears to me that you suffer from my evil self-centeredness, and evil egomania that is a betrayal of God and a denial of your humble creaturehood. Can you pray and ask God the Father to show you if I am right? Pray, Mary, for an honest heart.

With all tenderness in Christ, let me also point out how your self-centeredness manifests itself. When you were with us on Sunday and we had just finished hearing a message on repentance and personal sanity, you called your son-in-law a "swine." I was shocked, and so was everyone else. Your tone also seemed so bitter that I wondered whether you really had heard anything of the ministry of the Word and Spirit.

In company you are also so preoccupied with yourself and your own problems that you can give offence to people without knowing you are doing so. You have an opinion on everything, and you quickly express it without any regard for the feelings of others. For example, you put Nate [Mary's husband] down, interrupt him, and seem to assume he has no feelings at all.

I also believe that you talk down to people from a standpoint of superiority, and I have also seen you attack them or at least show a condemnatory attitude toward others. You feel condemned and you condemn others. From all I can see, you cannot forgive yourself and you do not seem to have forgiven your father and your son-in-law.

ER: LETTERS FROM JACK MILLER

Dear friend, none of us are born innocent and all need forgiveness. We are all desperately wicked sinners and need so much mercy that we should be ready to extend it to others. "Father, grant such mercy to me that I may show it to everyone else."

I cannot save you, Rose Marie cannot save you, Nate cannot save you. But Jesus—Oh, that is another matter! He is ready to save poor sinners and how I pray He will show you your deepest need—to know the power of His blood and righteousness to save you from the hell of your own anger and bitterness.

Rose Marie and I are praying for you to meet with Jesus. We know that He is the omnipotent Son of God having a powerful salvation. Ask Him to open your eyes to see it and appropriate it as the poor beggar takes hold of bread. Eat of Jesus and you will live. You are in our hearts and I speak out of great compassion.

Grace flows downhill. It runs down from the heights of God to the humble at the foot of the mountain. Grace also takes away fear and reveals the mighty, tender, compassionate securities of God. As you humble yourself, you will find fears fading away like the morning mists. Believe, only believe.

Much love,
Jack Miller

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CONCLUSION

The Peacemaker's Pledge

Peacemaking can involve a wide variety of activities, all of which may be summarized in four basic principles drawn directly from Scripture. Taken together, these principles could be called "The Peacemaker's Pledge."

The Peacemaker's Pledge

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict (Matt. 5:9; Luke 6:27–36; Gal. 5:19–26). We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ (Rom. 8:28–29; 1 Cor. 10:31–11:1; James 1:2–4). Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on his grace, we commit ourselves to responding to conflict according to the following principles.

Glorify God

Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord and bring him praise by

depending on his forgiveness, wisdom, power, and love as we seek to faithfully obey his commands and maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude (Ps. 37:1–6; Mark 11:25; John 14:15; Rom. 12:17–21; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 4:2–9; Col. 3:1–4; James 3:17–18; 4:1–3; 1 Peter 2:12).

Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye

Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God's mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts—confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused (Prov. 28:13; Matt. 7:3–5; Luke 19:8; Col. 3:5–14; 1 John 1:8–9).

Gently Restore

Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will overlook minor offenses or we will talk personally and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. When a conflict with a Christian brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner (Prov. 19:11; Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 6:1–8; Gal. 6:1–2; Eph. 4:29; 2 Tim. 2:24–26; James 5:9).

Go and Be Reconciled

Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation—forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences (Matt. 5:23–24; 6:12; 7:12; Eph. 4:1–3, 32; Phil. 2:3–4).

By God's grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing that conflict is an opportunity, not an accident. We will remember that success in God's eyes is not a matter

Conclusion

261

of specific results, but of faithful, dependent obedience. And we will pray that our service as peacemakers will bring praise to our Lord and lead others to know his infinite love (Matt. 25:14–21; John 13:34–35; Rom. 12:18; 1 Peter 2:19; 4:19).
