

RESOLVING CONFLICTS

book thirty in the series:

THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

DOUG BRITTON, MFT

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

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- Day One: Set the Stage for a Good Discussion
 - Day Two: Start the Conversation Wisely
 - Day Three: Speak and Listen Courteously
 - Day Four: Come to a Resolution
 - Day Five: Review and Test

Resolving Conflicts: Book thirty in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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By Doug Britton, MFT

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Twelve books on "Developing a Godly Character"

Twelve books on "Enjoying Healthy Relationships"

Twelve books on "Overcoming Personal Problems"

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight-book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

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- Book 1: Who is God?
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible
- Book 6: How to Pray
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
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- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
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- Book 21: Trusting God
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- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

Overcoming Personal Problems

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: Overcoming Self-Sufficiency
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement
- Book 47: Overcoming Failure
- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death

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Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in "The Owner's Manual to the New You" series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

Small Group Leader's Guidelines

Introduction. These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

Begin and end each study with prayer. Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

Review homework. Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

Personalize the lesson. Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses. Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

Get everyone involved. The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

Consider breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

Use day five for a review and test. Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

Want to Learn More?

Free online resources: For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups

Small group leader's book: For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups.

Day One: Set the Stage for a Good Discussion

Everyone experiences conflict from time to time—at home, on the job, in church, at school, and everywhere else. Sometimes we need to have a difficult conversation.

You may find yourself avoiding a difficult conversation at all costs. Perhaps you are afraid of getting into a fight, hurting other people’s feelings, or admitting your own weaknesses. It may seem better to say nothing rather than risk stirring up trouble.

Maybe you don’t know how to discuss problems in a loving, respectful manner. Difficult conversations often bring out our most terrible communication patterns.

In today’s lesson, you will read how to set the stage for productive difficult conversations. Practice these guidelines on lower-intensity issues before tackling harder problems. As you develop new habits, you will discover you can talk about any topic courteously and respectfully.



Discussion questions

1. How do you normally deal with conflict? Give an example of a fairly recent conflict.
2. Do you avoid conflict? If so, why?

Ask yourself, “Should I bring this up?”

Some of us are overly-reactive, ready to fight (or argue) at a moment’s notice. But we don’t have to respond to everything that bothers us. Sometimes the best thing to do is nothing.

The Bible tells us there are times when we should remain silent.

A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult. (Proverbs 12:16)

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

On the other hand, some topics are important and ought to be discussed—even if they produce tension. In fact, there are times when a rebuke or correction is appropriate. If you talk as a friend, you can discuss painful things.

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. (Proverbs 27:5-6)

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

Discussion question

3. Do you think you should bring up everything that bothers you? Why or why not?

Sometimes it is hard to know which principle to follow, whether to bring something up or to remain silent. The following questions will help you decide.

What are my motives?

Why do you want to talk? Do you desire to have a constructive conversation or to wound someone? Beware of anger, self-righteousness, and self-pity. Don't try to hide your motives from God or yourself.

All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the LORD. (Proverbs 16:2)

Is this really my problem?

Are there changes you personally should make? Should you focus on your own shortcomings, not the other person's?

- Are you overreacting because you have a problem with jealousy or anger?
- Are you angry with your boss or someone else, but taking it out on the wrong person?
- Are you suffering from a lack of sleep?

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:5)

Discussion question

4. Can you think of a time you got mad at someone and later realized you made a mistake or that it was your fault? If so, describe a time when this happened.

Have I been loving and respectful?

Do you usually talk to the other person with affirmation and respect? Or do you complain and criticize? If you have been critical, it may be wisest to be positive or neutral for a while before bringing up problems.

Do I nag?

I used to frequently point out people's faults at home and on the job. I thought I was being helpful, but I was actually beating people down.

Have I recently brought up the same problem?

Although some things should be brought up more than once, it is often counterproductive to bring up the same issue every day.

How important is this issue to me personally?

If you have lots of complaints or concerns, identify those that are most important to you and talk about them. Pray for patience about the rest.

You don't have to restrict yourself to only talk about major issues. It's okay to bring up relatively minor things from time to time. Just don't do it too often.

How important is this issue to God?

Keep an eternal perspective. Does God care about this issue? Are you allowing yourself to get upset by relatively unimportant things?

Is the other person open to discussing tough topics?

He or she may find it hard to talk about troublesome subjects. Perhaps this is because similar talks in the past have been disasters. Be sensitive to his or her feelings. Although there may be times you should bring something up even if the other person is resistant, it usually isn't wise to do it every day.

Is the other person overly sensitive to criticism?

If you have been a critical person, or if the other person is insecure, be careful not to bring up criticisms too often. Make it your focus, instead, to praise him or her.

Has the other person previously said "no" to this?

If he or she has said this topic is not open for discussion, it may be best to drop it for a while. Although there may be times when you should press forward with the discussion, in general it's better to let it rest for a time.

Should I give grace a chance?

Is your concern something you should give to God instead of trying to work it out yourself? By stepping back, praying, and letting God take over, you may see faster results than if you keep talking about it.

Discussion questions

5. Review the previous points under "Should I bring this up?" What are times you think it would be wise not to bring something up? Explain your answer.
6. What are times you think it would be wise to bring something up? Explain your answer.

Pray alone before talking

Do you rush into difficult conversations without seeking God's help first? It's easy to do, especially if you are angry. But when you speak before praying, you are much less likely to have a successful discussion. Talk with God before approaching the other person. Prepare yourself to have a good conversation.

Pray for a spirit of love, forgiveness, and humility.

Jesus said the mark of a Christian is love for others (John 13:35). If you lack a loving attitude, pray, "God, I have a bad attitude. I feel angry and sorry for myself. Please forgive me and help me deal with this situation in a Christ-like manner. Help me love the other person."

Pray for help to speak politely and respectfully.

Tell God you don't want to blurt out everything on your mind. Add that you don't want to react negatively to everything the other person says. Ask for self-control and the ability to speak courteously. Also ask God to guide you as you talk. Read the following psalm as a prayer.

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

Pray to be a good listener.

Most of us are so eager to say what is bothering us that we don't really listen to the other person. Ask God to help you listen carefully—not just to the other person's words, but to his or her heart.

I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests. (Philippians 2:20-21)

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry ... (James 1:19)

Ask for wisdom to see your part in the problem.

Ask God if you need to look at yourself instead of the other person. It is extremely difficult to see ourselves clearly. We need God's help. There have been many times when I prayed about a situation and realized I needed to make some personal changes before talking to someone else about a problem.

Pray for a servant's heart.

Tell God you want to serve the other person as you talk about a difficult topic. Even if you are the one who brings up frustrations or concerns, ask God to help you be sensitive to his or her issues.

Pray to have an eternal perspective.

Don't let your problems upset you. Seek God's help to have a heavenly perspective. Pray to have Paul's attitude:

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

Discussion questions

7. Do you agree you should pray to have a good attitude before talking about a conflict? Why or why not?
8. Review the points under "Pray alone before talking." Name two of these points that will help you. Explain how they will help.

Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

Memory verse

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

Day Two: Start the Conversation Wisely

It's important to put much thought and care into how you begin your conversation so you can set a positive tone for all that follows. Don't blurt out the first words that come to mind.

Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 29:20)



Choose a good time and place to talk

Timing is important. If either you or the other person is feeling grouchy, it is probably a bad time to start a serious discussion. If he or she seems busy, ask when would be a good time to talk. You could say, for example, "There is something important I'd like to talk about. Is this a good time? Or when would be a good time for you?"

Don't wait too long. In the effort to find a perfect time, you might put off talking forever. If you both are busy all the time, you may need to make the time to talk.

Choose a comfortable place to talk.

Make it your goal to start the discussion on as positive a note as possible. If the other person feels uncomfortable talking in a particular place, find another location.

Talk privately.

You will probably have much better conversations when there is no audience. On the other hand, some people seek public places such as restaurants for serious conversations. They find having other people around helps them keep their tempers. They speak quietly so no one can overhear.

For an extremely tough topic—for example, if you are confessing an affair—it might be wise to ask your pastor or a biblical counselor to be present.

Discussion questions

1. When is the best time for you to talk courteously and respectfully? Explain your answer.
2. Where is the best place for you to talk? Why is that?

Bring up your topic with sensitivity

Introduce your subject in a way that makes it as easy as possible for the other person to respond well. Bring up things as a friend speaking to a friend, not as a warrior confronting an enemy. As the Bible says, "pleasant words promote instruction" (Proverbs 16:21).

Gently share your feelings or concerns. Don't start a fight. "Let your gentleness be evident to all" (Philippians 4:5). If you approach the other person in humility, you greatly increase the chances that your message will be received.

Even if you express concern about sin in the other person's life, speak gently and courteously. Do not insult or attack.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. (Galatians 6:1)

Discussion questions

3. Do you agree that it's best to bring things up sensitively, or do you want to "punish" people with harsh, angry words? Explain your answer.
4. Describe the most effective way you have discovered to sensitively start a discussion.

Be clear.

Sometimes in an effort to be polite, we give a confusing message. Don't expect the other person to read your mind. Be sure he or she understands what you are saying.

Try to avoid making demands

Many people state "expectations" of others that seem reasonable at first, yet this often leads to disappointment and arguments. Here are some common demands people make:

- I expect you to be more mature.
- I expect you to stand up for me.
- I expect you to pay attention when I talk.
- I expect you to pray with me.
- I expect you to be less selfish.

Notice that although many of these desires could be stated courteously, in the above list they are presented as demands or "rights."

You may think you are justified in giving a speech, blowing up, or sulking when your expectations are not met. Yet James wrote:

Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. (James 3:10)

Discussion question

5. Do you agree that it's usually not a good idea to make demands? Why or why not?

Try one of these ways to start a difficult conversation

There are many ways to begin a difficult conversation. One or more of the following approaches can help you get started. Be creative, mixing elements from these techniques into your own style.

Ask if you have offended the other person.

Have you ever asked, "What's wrong? You seem upset," only to have the other person respond, "Nothing"? If so, he or she might have been upset with you, but was afraid to say anything for fear of starting an argument. Here is a better way to start:

“You seem upset. Is it because of something I did? I’d really like to know.” By asking if you caused offense, you give the other person permission to express feelings without fear of starting an argument.

Start with a compliment or words of appreciation.

If you compliment the other person before bringing up a problem, it may help him or her listen to you.

The apostle Paul frequently used this technique in his letters. For example, although he had many critical things to write to the Corinthians, he began the letter with compliments and words of encouragement (1 Corinthians 1:1-9).

Be sure to compliment the other person at other times too. (If the only time you compliment him or her is just before voicing a criticism, he or she will quickly come to dread your compliments.)

Directly, but gently, introduce the topic.

Sometimes a direct approach is best, but that doesn’t mean you need to be aggressive. For example, “I am feeling tense about something, and I really want to work it out. Could we talk?” Or, “I really don’t know how to bring this up, but it’s important.”

Express your feelings instead of attacking.

It is often useful to say how you feel without directly accusing the other person of doing something wrong. For example, “I feel hurt when you make jokes about me in public.” (Not “That’s mean when you make jokes about me in public.”)

Confess that you have a bad attitude, and ask for prayer.

If you have a bad attitude, don’t blame the other person. Instead, say something such as, “I’ve been feeling irritated lately, and I don’t like my attitude. Could we talk for a few minutes and then pray about my attitude?”

Admit, “I could be wrong.”

The older I get, the more I realize that sometimes I misunderstand people’s words, or I am oversensitive, or I am wrong. It is often wise to admit to the other person that you might have misunderstood what is really going on. Before stating your concerns, you could say, “I realize I may be wrong.”

Express concern for the other person.

If you are worried about someone’s actions, proceed cautiously. Unsolicited advice is seldom appreciated. Before starting the conversation, ask God if, when, and how you should talk.

When you speak, be sure to express love, not condemnation. It is usually best to be brief and to emphasize your concern for the other person’s welfare. Then leave the problem in God’s hands.

Identify how important the subject is to you.

Let the other person know how important something is to you, perhaps by saying that it scores “10” on an importance scale of 0-10.

Start by saying, “I love you.”

The other person may respond positively if you say something like, “I really love you, but there is something I’d like to talk about.”

If the topic is serious, you could say, "I think there is something we need to talk about. Before we start, please remember I really love you."

Discussion questions

6. Review the previous ways you could start a discussion. Which ones do you think will be most effective for you? Explain your answer.
7. How can you remember to use these approaches in the future?

Confront serious sin

There may be times when it is appropriate to strongly confront someone. Although Jesus said to turn the other cheek and walk an extra mile (Matthew 5:39-41), he also said to rebuke your brother if he sins against you (Matthew 18:15). There are times when a rebuke is in order. When you rebuke someone, remember Paul's instructions:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

If someone physically injures you, call the police.

Setting limits or taking a strong stand may be the wisest and most loving thing you could do if someone constantly criticizes your child, abuses drugs, is an alcoholic, or is sexually unfaithful.

For example, if you are married and your spouse frequently abuses drugs, you might say, "I'm concerned for the safety of the children and myself. I want you to move out until you get this under control."

Discussion question

8. What do you think is the best approach when confronting serious sin? Explain your answer.

Memory verse

Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 29:20)

Want to learn more?

Free online Bible studies

Studies on relationships

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/relationships

Homework – Day Two

1. Think of a potential conflict you are facing with someone. Where and when would it be wisest to talk? Explain your answer:
2. Do you agree you should discuss conflicts privately? Why or why not?
3. Philippians 4:5 says, “Let your gentleness be evident to all.” How can remembering this verse help you talk about conflicts? Explain your answer:
4. Do you agree that although there are exceptions, it's usually wisest not to make demands of others? Why or why not?

Day Three: Speak and Listen Courteously

The way you talk is usually more important than whether you are right or wrong, whether the other person listens to you, or whether you get your way.

Speak courteously as a friend, not as an enemy. Demonstrate love, patience, and wisdom, regardless of how the other person talks. As Paul wrote, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Corinthians 8:1).

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

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:35)

As you read the following guidelines, ask yourself how well you do in each area. Rate yourself from 0 to 10 on each topic.

- “0” means, “I really need to work on this.”
- “10” means, “I do very well at this.”



Listen intently. Try to see through others’ eyes. My score (0-10): ____

The Bible says to be “quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19). Don’t simply look for opportunities to make your own point or win an argument. Try to see things through the other person’s eyes and understand his or her feelings. If you are unsure what the other person is saying or feeling, ask clarifying questions.

Even if you think the other person is lying or justifying poor behavior, be polite and listen. Don’t interrupt by saying “you’re lying.” There may be more to the story than you realize.

Be alert to the possibility that you can think you understand what the other person is saying when you really don’t know the whole picture. Our ability to hear the true message is often clouded by our emotions. For example, if the other person gives a big compliment and a tiny criticism at the same time, it is easy to disregard the compliment and focus on the criticism.

Discussion questions

1. How well do you listen in the midst of a conflict? Does the other person usually think you understand (a) what he or she said and (b) what he or she is feeling? Explain your answer.
2. What could you do to be a better listener?

Speak courteously. My score (0-10): ____

Ask God to put a guard on your tongue, then exercise self-control. Never swear, call people names, or use filthy language.

Even if the other person’s words or actions are very challenging, respond in a godly manner.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. (James 3:9-10)

Share feelings and opinions without attacking. My score (0-10): _____

When you blame and accuse others, they are likely to react defensively. On the other hand, if you gently share your feelings, you are more likely to get a respectful response.

Make your point fairly quickly. Avoid long lectures. My score (0-10): _____

Does the other person seem to tune out when you talk? If so, you may be talking too much. It's not unusual for someone's eyes to glaze over in confusion or boredom as the talkative person speaks on and on and on.

You may give long speeches because you think it's the only way you can get people to pay attention. Yet if you talk incessantly, you will probably push others away.

Think before you speak. Decide what your point is and how to communicate it clearly and quickly. Then discipline yourself to talk for only a few minutes.

A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. (Proverbs 17:27)

Stick to the subject. My score (0-10): _____

Conversations sometimes become arguments because people keep bringing up more and more unresolved problems. Try to deal with one subject at a time.

Discussion questions

3. What was your 0-10 score for "Speak courteously"? Explain why you gave yourself that score.
4. Do you agree the way you talk is usually more important than whether you are right or wrong? Why do (or don't) you agree?
5. How well do you do at making your point fairly quickly and sticking to the subject? Do you need to work on these skills? If so, how will you discipline yourself to speak differently?

Speak honestly. My score (0-10): _____

The Bible says to "put off falsehood and speak truthfully" (Ephesians 4:25). Honesty is a key to meaningful communication. This is emphasized throughout the Bible.

Let others know you are trustworthy. Do not lie.

The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit. (Proverbs 15:4)

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. (Ephesians 4:25)

How should you respond to everyday personal questions such as "do you like my new coat?" It is possible to be both honest and diplomatic. For example, you could say "I like the color of the coat."

Even in extreme situations, such as when a married person has an affair, the wounded spouse often feels more betrayed by the other's dishonesty than by the actions.

When you speak the truth, always do so in love (Ephesians 4:15). Don't say something hateful and then say, "I was just being honest."

Always do what you say you will. God wants us to do what we say "even when it hurts" (Psalm 15:4).

Realize that people remember things differently. My score (0-10): ____

When counseling with people who are having a conflict, I often turn to each person and ask, "What happened from your perspective?" That's because people remember things differently.

People sometimes lie, and it's appropriate to lovingly confront them when they do so. However, I have observed that when one person is accused of lying, it's often a case of people having different perspectives, different memories, or different interpretations of what happened.

It's unlikely that anyone has a 100 percent accurate memory, including you. The most important thing is usually for you to try to understand the way the other person experienced the situation.

If someone says he or she is absolutely certain about who said what, you could help defuse any tension by saying, "I could remember wrong."

Discussion question

6. Do you agree that two people can remember things differently? How can knowing this help you resolve conflicts wisely?

Clarify your message. My score (0-10): ____

When you think the other person may have misunderstood you, bring clarity into the conversation by saying something such as:

I'm not sure I expressed myself clearly. Could you tell me what you think I meant?

I think you misunderstood what I meant to say. Let me try it again another way.

I can see I did a poor job of explaining my thoughts. What I really meant to say was ...

Try to minister to the other person. My score (0-10): ____

Even when discussing a problem, ask yourself, "How can I best serve the other person as we talk?" Does he or she feel insecure, afraid, confused, rejected, or neglected? Look for ways to build up the other person.

Discussion question

7. How could you minister to someone at the same time you are discussing a conflict?

Avoid provocative words. My score (0-10): ____

Certain words are almost guaranteed to get a bad reaction. Some words to avoid are:

- "Always"
- "Never"
- "If you loved me ..."

Control your anger. My score (0-10): ____

Throughout the Bible, we are warned not to give in to anger. Make it your goal to talk about disagreements in a way that would please God. Never engage in any form of physical violence.

Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city. (Proverbs 16:32)

He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction. (Proverbs 17:19)

It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel. (Proverbs 20:3)

Discussion question

8. What score did you give yourself for "Control your anger"? Describe why you gave yourself that score.

Call "time-out" if either of you talk in anger. My score (0-10): _____

If you call time-out, it's usually most effective to call it because of your attitude, not the other person's attitude. You could say, "I'm not handling this well, and I need to take a time-out. Let's continue our discussion in one or two hours."

Once you cool off, apologize, pray together, and start the conversation again.

There are three types of time-out. Choose the one that is most appropriate given the situation.

- Time-out to get away from the conversation until you are ready to talk respectfully.
- Time-out to pray.
- Time-out to analyze what is going on.

Discussion question

9. Review all the key points in today's lesson. What is one point you will work on when you have problems with someone? What will you do differently?

Memory verse

A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. (Proverbs 17:27)

Want to learn more?

Book by Doug Britton

Victory Over Grumpiness, Irritation, and Anger
www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/anger

Homework – Day Three

1. What does it mean to listen intently?
2. This lesson says the way you talk is usually more important than whether you are right or wrong. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever been in a situation when two people remembered something very differently? Briefly describe the situation, then write any lessons you learned from the situation:
4. If someone doesn't seem to understand what you are trying to say, what should you do? How would you go about doing it?

5. What is the main thing you personally need to do to control your anger?

6. How can you avoid changing the subject when resolving conflicts?

7. Write James 3:9-10 here:

8. What lesson does God want you to learn from James 3:9-10?

Day Four: Come to a Resolution

In days 1-3, you read about how to set the stage for a good discussion, how to start a conversation wisely, and how to speak and listen courteously.

If you have a conflict with someone and you followed the steps in the first three days, there's a good chance you already resolved the conflict. You will have clarified misunderstandings, expressed love and respect, and apologized.

However, there's also a chance the conflict is still alive. That's because you may still need to make a decision or action plan to resolve the conflict.



How to make a decision in eight steps

In today's lesson, you will read an eight-step decision-making process that you can use on the job, in church, with friends, in your family, or anywhere else. Feel free to modify it depending on your circumstances.

1. Pray together before making a decision.

In Day 1, you read about praying by yourself before starting a difficult conversation. Now that you are ready to make a decision, ask the other person if he or she would like to pray with you about the decision. If he or she agrees, pray together. Ask God to help you work well as a team and to make a decision that pleases him. Also ask him for wisdom.

Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. (Proverbs 4:5-6)

Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. (Matthew 18:19-20)

Discussion questions

1. Have you ever prayed with someone before making a decision? If so, how did praying affect the way you talked?
2. Are you willing to pray with someone before making a decision? Why or why not?

2. Define the issue you are discussing.

Define what you are talking about. Sometimes this is easy, but other times it's more complicated, and you need to identify underlying problems. For example, if your conflict is over one person not completing a task, the underlying problem might be that he or she:

- Is expected to do too much.
- Has trouble prioritizing what's important.

- Has not been getting enough sleep.

It's also helpful for each person to identify how he or she may have contributed to the problem. Jesus taught us to take the plank out of our eye so we can see clearly.

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:5)

Discussion question

3. What is the best way for two people to agree on what the issue is? What if they have different ideas?

3. Decide if one of you should have a greater voice.

Sometimes it makes sense to pay more attention to the opinion of one person and to give him or her more of a say in the final decision. Although there may be exceptions to the following guidelines, they may be useful.

Recognize areas of expertise.

If either of you has more knowledge or expertise in the area you are talking about, take advantage of this knowledge. Yet do not discount the other person's opinions.

Ask who cares the most about the decision.

If something is very important to one person and not to the other, it may make sense for that person to have more say in the decision. Each person could identify how important the issue is to him or her on a scale of 0 to 10.

Look at whom the decision will affect the most.

Sometimes it's reasonable for the person who is most affected by a decision to have the greatest say.

Discussion question

4. Describe a situation in which it might be good to give one person a greater voice.

4. Identify possible solutions.

Instead of trying to win, seek a resolution that is comfortable for both of you. Move from complaining to problem-solving.

Talk together to create a list of possible decisions. The first idea one of you comes up with may not be the best idea. Seek mutual resolutions ("win/win"), not personal victories. You may discover a resolution neither of you thought about at first.

At times it may be wise to ask your pastor, a mature Christian friend, or someone with expertise in the area you are discussing for advice. This may be humbling, yet it could help you discover the best possible solution.

For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure. (Proverbs 11:14)

Discussion question

5. What is a win/win solution? How can you go about finding one?

5. Evaluate the options.

Once you make a list of possible solutions, evaluate each one. Discuss each idea without ridiculing the other person's thoughts. Seek a solution with which you both feel comfortable.

Look to God's word.

Study the Bible to make sure you follow God's commands and principles when making decisions.

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:8)

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. (Psalm 119:11)

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. (Isaiah 40:8)

Do not violate either person's conscience.

Don't do anything that would violate either person's conscience, even if the action is not directly addressed in the Bible.

As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. ... But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. (Romans 14:14, 23)

Discussion question

6. Why is it important not to violate someone's conscience? Explain your answer.

6. Make a decision.

Try to make a decision you both feel comfortable with. It might be something one of you suggested, it might be a combination of both of your ideas, or it might be something entirely different from anything either of you thought of at first.

You might decide to compromise. Or either one of you might say, "Let's do it your way." On the other hand, one of you might say, "This is really important to me. Could we try my idea?"

If you often have trouble agreeing on a decision, you might try taking turns.

It's not always necessary to make an immediate decision. At these times you might agree to disagree and talk about it another time.

7. Clarify your decision.

Once you decide, be sure each of you understands your decision. It's common for two people to walk away from a discussion with radically different ideas about the outcome. Be clear about the decision and each person's responsibilities to carry out your plan.

Make sure that a real decision has been made before you take action. If you say you would like to do something and the other person says, "That's a good idea," or, "Maybe I could go for that," don't assume that means you have made a decision. His or her comment might only mean he or she is open to further discussion of that idea.

Discussion question

7. How can you clarify a decision without leaving any possibility of confusion?

8. Pray after you talk.

When you are done talking, pray together for God to bless your decision. Also pray for peace between yourselves if you felt any tension as you talked.

End the conversation well

The following guidelines can help you end your talks graciously and peacefully.

Be gracious.

If the conversation ends on a less than positive note, don't try to get in the last word. If the other person says something insulting, resist the temptation to insult him or her back.

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)

Be prepared for ongoing talks if necessary.

Many serious conflicts can't be dealt with in one conversation. Try to come to a resolution, but if you need to talk again, make a plan to continue your discussion another time.

Evaluate how well you talked.

After the discussion, it may be helpful to evaluate together how well you talked. Depending on the intensity of the discussion and your emotional state, it might be wise to wait a few hours, or even a day, before having this follow-up conversation. Apologize for any mistakes you made.

Discussion questions

8. Do you need to make changes in how you end difficult conversations when you don't agree on a decision?
9. If so, what will you do differently?

Memory verse

Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. (Proverbs 4:6)

Want to learn more?**Free online Bible study/studies**

Five Steps in Conflict Resolution

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/conflict-resolution

Homework – Day Four

1. What is a win/win solution? How can you achieve this type of solution?
2. Do you think the eight-step decision-making process might work? Why or why not?
3. What do you like about the eight steps? Explain your answer:
4. Do you think one or more of the steps might not work? Why or why not?

Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

True or false

- F 1. If something bothers you, you should always bring it up.
- F 2. Nagging may cause some resentment, but in the long run it really helps.
- T 3. It's a good idea to pray for a good attitude before discussing a conflict.
- T 4. Asking if you offended someone can be a good way to start a difficult conversation.
- F 5. It's a bad idea to tell the other person how important an issue is to you.
- T 6. Listening to deeply understand someone can be difficult.
- F 7. If someone remembers something differently than you do, he or she must be lying.
- F 8. It's always okay to say "always" when having a difficult conversation.
- T 9. When you resolve a conflict with someone, it may be wise to clarify your decision.
- T 10. If you can't come to an agreement, sometimes it's wise to agree to disagree.

Memory verses

- 1. Psalm 141:3
Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.

- 2. Proverbs 17:27
A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered.



About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

Doug and his wife Skeeter live in Northern California.



Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

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Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com and click on the "Seminars" link.

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In addition to “The Owner’s Manual to the New You,” Doug Britton has written many more cross-cultural, Bible-based books on leadership, discipleship, and key areas of daily living.

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Defeating Temptation
Healing Life’s Hurts
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Six Keys to Personal Growth
Six Keys to Successful Relationships
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