

By The Book - LG Study

Title: Stewarding Conflict: A Biblical Approach

Scripture Focus: Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 12:14-21

Introduction: Conflict is an inevitable part of human interaction. Whether it arises in our families, friendships, churches, or workplaces, it can be challenging and even painful. However, the Bible provides a framework for navigating conflict in a way that honours God and strengthens relationships. This study will explore the principles of "stewarding conflict" as outlined in Matthew 18 and Romans 12.

In "Peace Making", Ken Sande refers not to "conflict management" or "conflict resolution" but rather "stewarding conflict", recognising that stewardship is not for our own benefit, but must be in line with the will of our Master.

I. Matthew 18:15-17: A Process for Resolution

- **Direct Confrontation (v. 15):** Jesus emphasizes the importance of addressing conflict directly with the individual involved. This requires courage and humility.
 - **Discussion Points:**
 - What hinders us from directly addressing conflict? (Pride, fear, avoidance)
 - How can we approach this conversation with grace and respect? (Active listening, empathy, "I" statements)
- **Involving Witnesses (v. 16):** If direct confrontation fails, Jesus recommends involving one or two others to mediate the situation. (See also Romans 12:17 "be careful to do what is right in the eyes of people")
 - **Discussion Points:**
 - What are the benefits of involving witnesses? (Impartial perspective, accountability)
 - How should we choose witnesses wisely? (Trustworthiness, maturity, impartiality)
- **Church Discipline (v. 17):** As a last resort, the matter may need to be brought before the entire church.

- **Discussion Points:**

- What is the purpose of church discipline? (Restoration, protection of the community)
- How can we ensure that church discipline is carried out with love and justice?

II. Romans 12:14-21: A Mindset for Reconciliation

- **Blessing Our Enemies (v. 14):** This does not mean condoning wrongdoing but rather seeking their well-being.

- **Discussion Points:**

- How can we practically bless those who have wronged us? (Prayer, forgiveness, acts of kindness)
- What are the benefits of blessing our enemies? (Inner peace, spiritual growth)

- **Overcoming Evil with Good (v. 17-19):** This is a powerful principle for navigating conflict.

- **Discussion Points:**

- How can we demonstrate "good" in the midst of conflict? (Patience, kindness, self-control)
- What are the potential challenges to overcoming evil with good? (Temptation to retaliate, feeling powerless)

- **Vengeance Belongs to God (v. 19):** We are called to trust God for justice and to avoid seeking revenge ourselves.

- **Discussion Points:**

- How can we surrender our desire for revenge to God?
- What are the dangers of seeking revenge? (Bitterness, broken relationships, legalism)

III. Application

- **Identify a recent conflict in your life.**
- **Analyze the situation using the principles of Matthew 18 and Romans 12.**
- **Develop a plan for how you will steward this conflict in a God-honouring way.**

- Where do you need to change your attitude to and the ways you respond to conflict?
- Practice active listening and empathy in your daily interactions.
- Seek opportunities to bless others, even those who have wronged you.

Conclusion

Stewarding conflict is a challenging but essential aspect of Christian discipleship. By following the principles outlined in Scripture, we can navigate conflict in a way that promotes reconciliation, strengthens relationships, and glorifies God.

The Slippery Slope

Below is a copy of the Slippery Slope which you may wish to refer to during your discussions. Notice how the private to public spectrum of the slippery slope mirrors Jesus' specific teaching in Matthew 18. We'll talk more about the specific approaches (in the grey quadrants) in the coming weeks.

