

Biblical Counseling Keys
Conflict Resolution
Solving Your People Problems
by
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Living in obscurity as a Jewish orphan, she seemed the least likely candidate to be the mediator—the *only* mediator—to possibly save her people from sure destruction. However, the Lord knew her heart... and He knew she would face the most severe conflict of her life with complete humility and with total confidence in His provision.

The entire conflict arose because of conniving Haman, a royal official in the king's court, who devised a plot to murder every Jewish person in the empire. His fury had been flamed by a man who refused to bow down to him—namely, Esther's cousin Mordecai, who had raised her. Little did Esther know she would carry the fate of the Jewish people on her shoulders as she faced a conflict of epic proportions. Yet Mordecai aptly posed...

"Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" ([Esther 4:14](#))

I. Definitions

How does Esther, this unknown young woman, become involved in this critical conflict? The book of Esther recounts her story. After days of feasting, King Ahasuerus (King Xerxes) is *"merry with wine"* and wants to show off the stunning beauty of his wife before the people and nobles. He sends 7 attendants to summon her... however, Queen Vashti does the unthinkable and refuses to come. The king is furious because of her refusal. Such blatant disrespect must not go unpunished.

Heeding the adamant advice of his closest counselors, the king immediately issues a royal decree: Queen Vashti can never again enter into the king's presence, and she will be replaced! ([Esther 1:19](#)). With this new edict, the outward conflict between the king and queen appears to be "resolved." But the resolution of one conflict gives rise to another—now the king has no queen.

Because of the queen's open refusal of the king's command, his advisors feel action has to be taken, otherwise...

"There will be no end of disrespect and discord." ([Esther 1:18](#))

A. What Is a Conflict?

Throughout the kingdom a major search ensues to find a distinguished queen for the disgruntled king. All the beautiful young virgins in the land are rounded up so that *"the girl who pleases the king"* can be selected as queen ([Esther 2:4](#)). Esther, described as a young woman who *"was lovely in form and features,"* ([Esther 2:7](#)) quickly gains favor. At cousin Mordecai's instruction, she does not reveal her heritage. Meanwhile, wise Mordecai saves the king's life by reporting an assassination plot against him. The event is recorded in the annals of the king.

After a full year of preparation and pampering, Esther finally stands before the king, who *"was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women... and made her queen instead of Vashti"* ([Esther 2:17](#)).

So the plan for avoiding discord and accommodating the king now puts Esther on the path of God's divine purpose—but also on a collision course with a conflict of colossal proportions, a challenge far greater than replacing a dishonored queen.

- **Conflicts** are disagreements, struggles, or battles over opposing issues or principles.
- **"Conflictus,"** the Latin word, means an "act of striking together" or clashing with.
- **Conflict,** in the letters of Paul, is often presented by using forms of the Greek word *agon*, from which the English word "agony" developed. Originally used to describe a gathering of spectators for the Greek athletic games, this word changed over time to refer to various types of conflict and became a metaphor in the New Testament to describe spiritual conflict, intense labor, or trial. The apostle Paul said, *"I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally"* ([Colossians 2:1](#)).

Soon a personal power struggle begins when corrupt Haman, the top royal official, becomes infuriated with Mordecai, who day after day refuses to bow down to him when Haman passes by the gate where Mordecai waits. Haman is outraged. When he discovers Mordecai is a Jew, he manipulates the king to order a royal decree mandating the massacre of all the Jews—every man, woman, and child. Haman thinks he has won the conflict. He will get his homage... but at a very high and *horrific cost*.

"When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes." ([Esther 3:5-6](#))

B. What Is the Difference between Resolution and Reconciliation?

Once the king's decree was pronounced throughout the provinces, no positive resolution was possible. However, Mordecai appeals to Esther for help. She can't believe what Mordecai is asking her to do. He knows the law: "*Any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned by the king has but one law: that he be put to death*" ([Esther 4:11](#)).

Since she has not been summoned by the king for 30 days, how can she go to the king to plead on behalf of her people? What if the king becomes displeased with her? Clearly, going to the king will mean putting her life on the line, to which Mordecai responds that *her life is on the line either way...*

"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape." ([Esther 4:13](#))

Resolution versus Reconciliation

Resolution and reconciliation are different.

- **Resolution** means finding the answer or analyzing a complex notion into simpler ideas.
- **Reconciliation** means 100% restoration to harmony... to bring together again.

Some differences may never be resolved, but you can still be reconciled to those with whom you differ. At other times, resolution of differences may be possible, but reconciliation may be inappropriate, such as in the case of ongoing adultery or cult entrapment. God requires only that, as far as it is possible, you seek to be at peace with everyone....

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." ([Hebrews 12:14](#))

Forgiveness and Reconciliation Are Different

QUESTION: "Is forgiveness the same as reconciliation?"

ANSWER: No. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness focuses on the offense, whereas reconciliation focuses on the relationship. Forgiveness requires no relationship, while reconciliation requires nurturing a relationship—two people, in agreement, walking together toward the same goal. The Bible says...

"Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" ([Amos 3:3](#))

C. What Are Types of Conflict?

All of a sudden, Esther is facing an *inner conflict* just as heavy, just as grave, and just as deadly as the *outer conflict* caused by Haman.

On multiple levels, Esther has a conflicted soul. Where will she find the strength, the courage, to do what needs to be done, what *must* be done?...

"Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.... The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace." ([Habakkuk 1:3](#); [Psalm 29:11](#))

#1 Inner Personal Conflict

- —A struggle *within yourself* to decide *between 2 or more choices*.
- —In the book of Esther, does Esther approach the king in an attempt to save the Jewish people from extinction—which could earn her a death sentence—or does she remain silent and live? She has no illusions about the risk. *"All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king"* ([Esther 4:11](#)).

#2 Outer Personal Conflict

- —A clash of ideas or interests *between 2 or more people*.
- —In the book of Esther, malicious Haman plots to have Mordecai murdered only because Mordecai refuses to bow down to him. *"When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged"* ([Esther 3:5](#)).

#3 Inner Organizational Conflict

- —A competitive or opposing action *within a group* (a family, department, church, political party, state, or nation).
- —In the book of Esther, the king's chief noble and the king's queen are on a collision course that will cost one of them dearly. One of them will die... not by the hand of an outsider... but by the hand of their own king ([Esther 4:11](#)). The king becomes enraged after realizing Haman has manipulated him into issuing a death sentence to murder all the Jewish people. *"The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life"* ([Esther 7:7](#)).

#4 Outer Organizational Conflict

- —A battle or opposing action *between 2 or more groups* (families, companies, religions, or countries)
- —In the book of Esther, because of Haman's surreptitious plot, the Persian nation threatens to annihilate the entire Jewish population—men, women, and

children. *"Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and little children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods"* ([Esther 3:13](#)).

Conflict abounds... in the book of Esther, just as conflict fills the pages of many lives. Disharmony in the home, wars in the workplace, the "should I" or "shouldn't I" struggles... all try us and ought to lead us to the One to whom Esther will turn for the strength, courage, and resolution she needs. His name isn't even mentioned in the entire book of Esther, but His sovereignty spreads itself like a shadow over every chapter. The Bible tells us that...

"Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death." ([Psalm 68:20](#))

D. What Is God's Heart on Conflict Resolution?

Drastic times call for drastic measures.

Esther asks Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Susa, one of the empire's main capitals, and has them go three entire days without food and drink. She and her maids will do the same. Esther enlists the people of God to fast and pray for rescue, *for resolution to the most formidable challenge of her life....*

"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." ([Esther 4:16](#))

Esther's act of faith works to open the king's heart. She approaches him without having been summoned, and he extends to her the golden scepter of grace. She is allowed to make her request. Queen Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet that day, the king seems eager to fulfill her wishes. Haman is convinced that he is included in the invitation because he is in the king's favor....

"Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits.... Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials.... 'I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow.'" ([Esther 5:9-12](#))

Little does Haman know that on this fateful day someone will be honored, but that someone won't be him!

At the advice of his wife and friends, Haman orders a gallows 50 cubits high (75 feet) to be built on which he intends to have Mordecai hanged. But while Haman's workmen are busily building, the king has a sleepless night and orders that the book of memorable deeds during his reign be read to him. Found within its pages is the account of Mordecai's heroism in saving the king's life.

The following morning Haman arrives at the palace intending to top off his enjoyment of the banquet with manipulating the king to agree to his request to have Mordecai hanged, but the king asks him, *"What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?"* ([Esther 6:6](#)).

Confident the king must be referring to him, Haman proposes placing royal robes and a crown on the man and having a noble official lead him on one of the king's horses through the city square, proclaiming, *"This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"* ([Esther 6:9](#)).

While Haman is indeed part of the king's plan, his role is *beside* the horse, not *on* it! Humiliated, Haman leads Mordecai, mounted on a steed, through the city streets... for all to see. Entirely mortified, Haman returns home after the public spectacle. There he receives from his wife and friends a message, not of hope, but of doom: *"Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!"* ([Esther 6:13](#)).

The story of Esther teaches...

- **Conflicts** can be used to accomplish God's purpose. (Only after becoming queen was Esther able to save the Jewish nation.) *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"* ([Romans 8:28](#)).
- **Conflicts** cannot always be avoided. (Esther and the Jewish people could not escape Haman's threats.) *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* ([John 16:33](#)).
- **Conflicts** are not necessarily bad—they can actually sharpen us if we respond correctly. Handled well, they provide an opportunity for role modeling. (For centuries, Esther has been and continues to be a role model of how to make an appeal to a higher authority.) *"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another"* ([Proverbs 27:17](#)).
- **Conflicts** require action toward peace. (Esther had to take action in order to save her people.) *"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification"* ([Romans 14:19](#)).
- **Conflicts** require advance preparation and planning. (Esther meticulously planned 2 royal dinners, the timing of her petition, and her very words.) *"Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled"* ([1 Peter 1:13](#)).
- **Conflicts** can sometimes be settled through negotiation. (Esther graciously negotiated with the king.) *"Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise"* ([Proverbs 19:20](#)).

E. Who Creates Conflict and Who Keeps It Going?

The next day, at the king's urging during the 2nd feast, Queen Esther finally makes her request for her people to be spared from annihilation by the crafty snake, Haman ([Esther 7:3-6](#)). Not only does the king grant her request, but in his rage he has Haman hanged on the very gallows Haman had built for Mordecai. Haman was indeed elevated, but not in the way he expected! Instead of remaining in power to see the destruction of the Jewish people, Haman had a "short stop and a sudden drop" from grace with the king.

After a time of great conflict, true resolution resonates throughout the land for the Jewish people. But none of this would have happened if Esther had *avoided* the conflict (retracting from trouble like a turtle). Instead, she confronted the conflict and rose to the occasion, "*for such a time as this*" ([Esther 4:14](#)). The Bible says...

"There is a time for everything... a time to be silent and a time to speak." ([Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7](#))

3 Attackers... Outwardly Aggressive

#1 Wolves...

Wolves are fierce, savage, and cruel animals that make a terrible howling sound and attack even large animals. They possess immense stamina to travel long distances. They use scent markings to claim their territory, communicating: "This territory is occupied.... This territory is mine!"

- —The word *wolf* is also used in reference to *people* who are:
 - Known to be "wolves in sheep's clothing." They cloak their intentions beneath an innocent, friendly facade
 - Known to be forward, direct, and zealous in the seduction of women
 - Known to "wolf" down food, eating greedily—devouring their food like prey. The Bible describes the destruction wolves can cause... "*Her officials within her are like wolves tearing their prey; they shed blood and kill people to make unjust gain*" ([Ezekiel 22:27](#)).

#2 Snakes/Serpents/Vipers...

These are creeping creatures that can also move rapidly. Although many snakes are harmless, they are most often feared for their hissing, rattling, biting, and striking. They inflict burning pain and cause inflammation where they bite. Considered cunning and subtle, they can also be malicious and deadly poisonous.

- —The word *serpent* is also used in reference to *people* who are:
 - Known to be dangerous and treacherous
 - Known to inject injurious venom into people or groups by poisoning their minds, hearts, or reputation
 - Known to act silently, secretly, and sinuously to inflict injury on others. The Bible describes the destructive nature of serpents.... "*They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips*" ([Psalm 140:3](#)).

#3 Hornets...

Hornets are any of the larger social wasps that, because they possess the ability to bite, can bite and sting at the same time. Just one hornet can mobilize an entire nest to sting aggressively. In a swarm, they can drive cattle and horses to madness, and their formidable stings can also kill human beings.

- —The word *hornet* is also used in reference to *people* who are:
 - Known to be excessively angry or "mad as a hornet"
 - Known to gather others to "swarm" a person or place, thus creating havoc or harm with "stings" (for example, accusations, threats, slander, etc.)
 - Known to build a "hornet's nest" of angry, venomous people who can be deadly. The Bible depicts their devastating ability in this description... "*I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow*" ([Joshua 24:12](#)).

3 Avoiders... Inwardly Passive

#1 Tortoises...

Tortoises are protected by large, dome-shaped shells that are difficult for predators to crack. They withdraw their necks into their shells by folding them under their spines or folding their necks to the side. Tortoises possess excellent nighttime vision but poor daytime vision because of their color blindness. They have short, sturdy feet famous for moving slowly, partly because of their heavy shells, but also because of their relatively inefficient, sprawling gait.

- —The word *tortoise* (or *turtle*) is also used in reference to *people* who are:
 - Known for being slow or for being stragglers
 - Known for "withdrawing into a shell" when threatened
 - Known for dawdling or shirking responsibility in the Bible... "*any kind of great lizard*" would include tortoises ([Leviticus 11:29-30](#)).

#2 Chameleons...

Chameleons can change to a variety of colors—brown, green, blue, yellow, red, black, or white—in response to temperature, light, and mood. A calm chameleon can be green, but when angry, it can turn yellow. Chameleons possess elongated tongues that can be up to twice the length of their bodies, and their eyes move independently of each other, giving them sharp, stereoscopic vision and depth perception.

- —The word *chameleon* is also used in reference to *people* who are:
 - Known to change their minds or even their character, but only superficially... merely to be expedient
 - Known for their quick or frequent changes, especially in appearance, in order to "fit in"
 - Known to blend in with diverse groups by reflecting each group's look, behavior, and belief when with the group. The Bible states... "*These are unclean for you... the chameleon*" ([Leviticus 11:29-30](#)).

#3 Weasels...

Weasels have a reputation for cleverness and guile, especially as they perform a "hypnotic dance" in front of their prey. These small, furry animals can twist and burrow down into small

holes. They produce a thick, oily, powerful smelling liquid called musk, used for scent marking and defense.

- —The word *weasel* is also used in reference to *people* who are:
 - Known to act deviously, unscrupulously, and underhandedly
 - Known to use "weasel words" in order to be evasive or insincere
 - Known to evade or escape from a situation by "weaseling out" of itIn the Bible...
"the rat" would include the weasel ([Leviticus 11:29](#)).

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSFUNCTIONAL CONFLICT

It is a classic case of sibling rivalry, except that it originates in the womb. Rebekah, the mother of twins Esau and Jacob, senses more than just the random kicking of tiny feet within her; there is a real struggle going on. The babies jostle within her to such an extent that Rebekah inquires of the Lord as to the reason. The Lord explains, *"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger"* ([Genesis 25:23](#)).

On the day of the twins' birth, Esau arrives first, reddish and covered with hair. Jacob quickly follows, his hand holding his brother's heel, a foretelling image of the position he would usurp from his brother. The name Jacob means "he takes by the heel" or "to supplant, deceive, attack from the rear."

The two brothers could not have been more different. Esau is a masterful hunter, the proverbial outdoorsman, while Jacob is reserved, preferring to remain indoors and cook. Esau is brash and brazen, while Jacob is cool and calculating, as evidenced by the red stew incident when Esau, exhausted from a day of working in the field, wants some stew Jacob has boiling in a pot. His brother obliges him, but only after manipulating Esau into selling his birthright in exchange for the stew ([Genesis 25:31](#)).

Jacob later deceives his aging father, Isaac, by claiming to be Esau and thereby obtains the sought-after blessing of the firstborn. This deception prompts threats of murder from Esau, and Jacob has to leave home....

"Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'"
([Genesis 27:41](#))

A. What Are Common Statements Used in Conflict?

Conflict—it happens to the best of us. Two of God's premier workers in the early days of the church, Paul and Barnabas, have *"a sharp disagreement"* ([Acts 15:39](#)) resulting in each going

their separate ways. The cause for contention is that Barnabas wants to take his cousin John Mark along with Paul as they revisit cities where they have ministered.

Paul disagrees, mindful that John Mark deserted them on a previous mission trip. John Mark has obviously regained the trust of Barnabas, but not of Paul. Their differences are resolved by the launching of two separate missionary journeys instead of one, with Barnabas and his cousin going to Cyprus, and with Paul and Silas going to Syria and Cilicia. Yet later Paul made this significant statement....

"I appeal to you... that all of you agree with one another." ([1 Corinthians 1:10](#))

Who Are Attackers/Who Are Avoiders?

7 Faulty Accusations of Attackers

- "You'll never change."
- "You're hopeless—there's no hope for you."
- "You'll always be against me."
- "You'll reject me—it's just a matter of time."
- "You can't be trusted—ever."
- "You've failed too much—you're a failure."
- "You're totally at fault if this relationship fails." Instead of focusing on the faults of others (out of pride), the Bible tells us to bear the burdens of others (out of humility)... *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself"* ([Galatians 6:2-3](#)).

7 Faulty Expectations of Avoiders

- "You should never create conflict in our relationship."
- "You should never get angry with me because I can't handle it."
- "You should always see things my way—if you care about me."
- "You should always do things my way—if you're really loyal to me."
- "You must look only to me to meet all of your needs."
- "You should look only to me to make you happy."
- "You'll always need me to make you secure." However, the Bible says we should look to the Lord as our Need Meeter... *"My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus"* ([Philippians 4:19](#)).

B. How Do Attackers and Avoiders Appear?

Each of us begins to develop a style of handling conflict at an early age. Our personal ways of "fighting" come from our natural instinct, personality, and early family dynamics. Many of us are unable to defuse conflict because we are repeating the extreme patterns of childhood... either *attacking* or *avoiding*. Those in these 2 different categories can be thought of as either *attackers* or *avoiders*. Considering the characteristics of the 6 creatures mentioned earlier will help define

the personalities of the 2 categories. The problem with both styles is that neither strategy appropriates the grace that is available to a child of God. The Bible says...

"See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." ([Hebrews 12:15](#))

Attackers... Outwardly Aggressive

#1 The Wolfalias, "dictator"

(a person granted absolute power, holding complete autocratic control)

- —Seeks to control everyone and everything
- —Judges the actions and motives of others
- —Refuses to listen to opposing opinions with an open mind
- —Uses criticism to cut people down
- —Engages in power plays**Message:** "Give in to me or I'll attack you!"**Goal:** To feel powerful"*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves*" ([Matthew 7:15](#)).

#2 The Snakealias, "backbiter"

(a person who says mean or spiteful things behind another person's back)

- —Strikes when you're not looking
- —Uses criticism and "put-downs"
- —Starts false rumors
- —Pretends to have done nothing wrong
- —Gathers allies**Message:** "Don't tangle with me or you will regret it later."**Goal:** To feel superior"*You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*" ([Matthew 12:34](#)).

#3 The Hornetalias, "faultfinder"

(a person who is disposed to find fault, is critical, petty, and nagging)

- —Registers repetitive complaints
- —Makes negative statements about everything
- —Blames others
- —Pulls others into disagreements
- —Delights in misery**Message:** "Don't get on my bad side or I'll talk about you!"**Goal:** To feel valuable"*A fool's mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul*" ([Proverbs 18:7](#)).

Avoiders... Inwardly Passive

#1 The Turtlealias, "retreater"

(a person who withdraws from what is difficult, dangerous, or disagreeable)

- —Plays dumb
 - —Gives one-word answers
 - —Withdraws
 - —Seeks secrecy
 - —Makes you feel guilty for asking questions
- Message:** "Don't confront me because it won't do any good."**Goal:** To feel safe "*A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful*" ([Proverbs 14:25](#)).

#2 The Chameleonalias, "obliger"

(a person who is bound in some way to another or is in someone's debt for a favor or service)

- —Avoids making decisions
 - —Acts innocently
 - —Appears nice and agreeable
 - —Recoils from making a commitment
 - —Downplays differences
- Message:** "I'm nice to you; you owe it to me to be nice back."**Goal:** To feel accepted "*Fear of man will prove to be a snare*" ([Proverbs 29:25](#)).

#3 The Weaselalias, "twister"

(a person who perverts meanings, squirms, is devious, and uses gimmicks)

- —Uses clever defensives
 - —Sidesteps the issue
 - —Twists and bends the truth
 - —Blames others
 - —Avoids taking responsibility or ownership of problems
- Message:** "I'm not going to get pinned down."**Goal:** To feel confident "*A man of perverse heart does not prosper; he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble*" ([Proverbs 17:20](#)).

C. Who Displays Which Style of Conflict in Scripture?

Based on the thousands of narratives throughout the Bible, even the novice reader sees that negative conflict has been "alive and well" from the beginning of time. For example, Abraham, on two different occasions, lies about his relationship with Sarah, his wife—he passes her off as his sister. Because of her beauty, he fears two different monarchs will kill him in order to take her. Because of his fear, Abraham acts like a turtle, hiding in its shell.

A different kind of avoider is Abraham's grandson, Jacob. He wants the birthright due his older twin brother. Instead of telling the truth, deceitful Jacob lies, connives, and weasels his way into his father's presence and blessing. Jacob is a weasel of the first order!...

"Esau said, 'Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!'" ([Genesis 27:36](#))

Which type of *attacker* or *avoider* is each of the following people? (No one is in conflict all the time, but all of us experience conflict.) Analyze and identify the negative conflict styles in each of the following relationships. (Hint: *Read the Scripture first...* then fill in the blanks.)

(Note: Answers are found at the end of this set of *Keys*)

- **Relationship #1—Between the Serpent, Adam, and Eve**
 - —The Serpent: He is an attacker, a *snake*.... He plays the part of himself! "*The serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman [Eve], 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?'"* ([Genesis 3:1](#)).
 - —Adam: He is an avoider, a *weasel*.... He tried to *weasel* out of accepting responsibility for his wrong choices by blaming Eve! "*The man [Adam] said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it'"* ([Genesis 3:12](#)).
 - —Eve: "*Then the LORD God said to the woman [Eve], 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate'"* ([Genesis 3:13](#)).
- **Relationship #2—Cain toward Abel**
 - —Cain: "*Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him"* ([Genesis 4:8](#)).
- **Relationship #3—Between the Philistines, Delilah, and Samson**
 - —The Philistines: "*The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, 'See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver'"* ([Judges 16:5](#)).
 - —Delilah: "*She said to him, 'How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength.' With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death"* ([Judges 16:15-16](#)).
 - —Samson: "*So he told her everything. 'No razor has ever been used on my head,' he said, 'because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man'"* ([Judges 16:17](#)).
- **Relationship #4—King Saul toward David**
 - —King Saul: "*He [Saul] raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, 'I will pin David to the wall.' But David evaded him twice"* ([1 Samuel 18:10-11](#) ESV).
- **Relationship #5—King David toward Bathsheba**

- —King David: *"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says.... 'Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own'"* ([2 Samuel 12:7, 9-10](#)).
- **Relationship #6—The Pharisees toward Jesus**
 - —Pharisees: *"Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples.... 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.... You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?'"* ([Matthew 23:1, 13, 33](#)).
- **Relationship #7—Pilate toward Jesus**
 - —Pilate: *"On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time"* ([Luke 23:6-7](#)).
- **Relationship #8—Judas toward Jesus**
 - —Judas: *"Judas Iscariot... asked, 'What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?'"* So they counted out for him thirty silver coins" ([Matthew 26:14-15](#)).
- **Relationship #9—Martha toward Jesus**
 - —Martha: *"Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'"* ([Luke 10:40](#)).
- **Relationship #10—Peter toward Jesus**
 - —Peter: *"Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee,' she said. But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, 'This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.' He denied it again, with an oath: 'I don't know the man!' After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, 'Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.' Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!' Immediately a rooster crowed"* ([Matthew 26:69-74](#)).

III. CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Mix two or more people together and you have a montage of differing personalities, priorities, perceptions, and preferences... a concoction ripe for *conflict*. Often the result is fingers pointing in accusation rather than hands shaking in agreement. Random words of blessing can be quickly eaten up by words of bitterness.

Conflict was experienced by the first family God created—conflict among Adam and Eve and their offspring—and it is still being experienced in homes today, as well as in workplaces and churches and among nations. Who hasn't at times wanted to throw their hands up in the air and exclaim, "Why can't we all just get along?" *Well, we can*—with the empowerment of God and

through our obedience to Him. His Word provides principles for peace that can bring about the supernatural result of reconciliation and resolution, from the boardroom to the bedroom. The Bible tell us to...

"Encourage one another and build each other up." ([1 Thessalonians 5:11](#))

A. Why Are Some People Attackers and Others Avoiders?

Everyone has it... no one wants it... no one can escape it! What is *it*? One common denominator for us all is *conflict*. But where does it come from? People are who they are and act the way they act as a result of a combination of factors. The Bible says...

"He who loves a quarrel loves sin." ([Proverbs 17:19](#))

- **Natural temperament** or personality types
 - —You were born with a natural bent toward being outgoing or reserved, compliant or defiant, aggressive or passive.
 - —Your temperament/personality traits can work to your advantage or disadvantage depending on whether you learn to use them productively in resolving conflicts or destructively in creating conflicts. "*Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God*" ([2 Corinthians 3:5](#)).
- **Early childhood experiences**
 - —You were deeply influenced by your early family relationships through words you heard and behaviors you saw that gave you messages about who you are and what you do and how to respond to conflict.
 - —You can change the assumptions you adopted about yourself and about conflict resolution that are influencing your behavior today by identifying the messages you received growing up in your family and evaluating them as to whether they are helpful or harmful. "*Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good*" ([Job 34:4](#)).
- **Physical factors**
 - —You were born with certain physical characteristics, such as brain chemistry, that may be affecting the way you respond to the rush of adrenaline experienced during times of conflict.
 - —You can have a thorough medical checkup. When experiencing a conflict, you may even want to have an evaluation performed on your brain chemistry. Did you know you can learn ways to actually change the chemistry of your brain if it is causing you problems in conflict resolution? "*He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave*" ([Psalm 107:20](#)).
- **Learned behaviors**
 - —You may have *unintentionally* learned negative ways of responding to conflict from the negative people in your life, especially those who are *attackers* or *avoiders*.
 - —You can also *intentionally* "unlearn" negative patterns by learning new behaviors, including learning from those who embrace conflict as a *fact of life* and

who find ways of productively resolving them. "Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance" ([Proverbs 1:5](#)).

B. What Unmet Needs Drive Attackers and Avoiders?

We are all created with 3 God-given inner needs—the needs for love, significance, and security. These needs can be translated into the need to feel heard and understood, to feel encouraged and at peace, to feel affirmed and accepted, and to feel confident and courageous. Or these needs can be negatively translated into the need to feel superior. Unmet needs can become the driving force behind why we act the way we act when we are faced with a conflict. The challenge, of course, is to find a way to get our legitimate needs met legitimately rather than illegitimately. This can be accomplished only through a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible says...

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." ([2 Peter 1:3](#))

Attackers Feel Insignificant

- Wolves... have a goal to feel *powerful*.
 - —Children who grow up feeling insignificant within their families typically become driven by the need to feel significant. This drive can result in finding destructive ways of meeting this need.
 - —Children who feel powerless can develop aggressive tactics to overpower others. These newly developed *wolves* become fiercely competitive in order to feel like true "winners." They become dictatorial in order to feel powerful. Thus, their need to feel *significant* is met... temporarily.
- Serpents... have a goal to feel *superior*.
 - —Children who grow up experiencing "put-downs" regularly and are the target of belittling comments may become driven by the need to overcome feelings of inferiority.
 - —Children who feel inferior can become behind-the-scene backbiters. These newly developed serpents spread poisonous rumors in order to feel superior to others... temporarily.
- Hornets... have a goal to feel *valuable*.
 - —Children who grow up being told that "children are to be seen but not heard" or whose opinions and feelings are virtually discounted may become driven by the need to feel valuable... to be heard and understood.
 - —Children who don't feel valuable typically can develop a negative attitude. Making constant complaints is a way to get the ear of others, leaving these newly developed hornets feeling valuable enough to be heard and understood... temporarily. "Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right" ([Proverbs 20:11](#)).

Avoiders Feel Insecure

- Tortoises... have a goal to feel *safe*.

- —Children who grow up in homes where anger is unrestrained, conflict goes unresolved, and where few positive interaction experiences occur typically become driven by the need for peace.
- —Children who don't feel "safe" typically make being safe their life goal, seeking to protect themselves from "danger." By turning inward and emotionally walling themselves off from others, these newly developed *tortoises* feel a sense of safety... temporarily.
- Chameleons... have a goal to feel *accepted*.
 - —Children who grow up with criticism and negative feedback from significant adults in their lives and who don't receive compliments and praise typically become driven by the need for acceptance.
 - —Children starved for acceptance can become classic people pleasers. They do whatever they think is necessary to make and keep everyone happy and to avoid being criticized or rejected, leaving them—these newly developed *chameleons*—feeling accepted... temporarily.
- Weasels... have a goal to feel *confident*.
 - —Children who grow up with an overprotective, controlling parent and who have no firm boundaries or personal accountability for their actions typically become driven by the need for confidence.
 - —Children who lack courage to take a stand find that becoming shrewd and evasive rather than honest and forthright keeps them "out of trouble." This leaves these newly developed *weasels* with a sense of *confidence* and *courage*... temporarily. "*The LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared*" ([Proverbs 3:26](#)).

C. What Is the Root Cause of Negative Conflict?

Conflict comes hurling at Paul one day, one stone at a time.

His Jewish brethren, proponents of legalism and opponents of the gospel of grace, spur a crowd to throw stones at Paul—a crowd that only moments before sought to offer sacrifices to him as to a god for his healing of a crippled man. After the stoning, Paul is dragged out of their city and left for dead. However, when his disciples gather around him, he gets up and goes into the city of Lystra and on to Derbe with Barnabas the next day.

As they travel, Paul and Barnabas, recognizing that opposition and conflict are inevitable, reassure the followers of Jesus they encounter, "*encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said*" ([Acts 14:22](#)).

The reason we all experience conflict is rooted in a system of wrong beliefs. We assume that what we want is what we need and that it is up to us to defeat those who oppose us. After all, if we don't protect our interests, who will? This fear-based thinking causes us to selfishly respond by either attacking or avoiding people or situations we perceive to be threatening. An example in the Bible is found in Acts....

"When the Jews [in Antioch] saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.... Some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead." ([Acts 13:45; 14:19](#))

- **WRONG BELIEF:** "I am afraid of conflict because it reflects negatively on me. To feel secure and significant, I must get rid of conflict by conquering it, compromising on it, or avoiding it." **RIGHT BELIEF:** "I know that conflict is a natural result of living with different types of people. My sense of security and significance is based on my identity in Christ and in His perfect love and acceptance of me."

"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." ([1 John 4:18](#))

D. What Causes the Worst Conflict?

Conflict with people is one matter—but conflict with God is another. Why is conflict with God the *worst* conflict?

Can you imagine the small parts of a watch refusing to operate as the watchmaker designed them to operate? What if the hands of a watch moved in the opposite direction? The watch would be useless. You're not useless, but you're a lot like that watch.

When God created you, He had a plan for you. When you refuse to yield your will to Him, you miss His plan and purpose for your life. This means you are in conflict with Him—the very One who loves you and created you.

God wants a relationship with you. When you yield to a relationship with Him, then He will fulfill the very purpose for which you were created. The Lord says...

"I know the plans I have for you... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." ([Jeremiah 29:11](#))

How to Resolve Your Conflict with God

There are **4** spiritual truths you need to know.

4 Points of God's Plan

#1 God's Purpose for You... is *Salvation*.

- —What was God's motive in sending Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says... "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send*

his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" ([John 3:16-17](#)).

- —What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said... *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" ([John 10:10](#)).*

#2 Your Problem... is Sin.

- —What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is right, but choosing what is wrong. The Bible says... *"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" ([James 4:17](#)).*
- —What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual "death"... eternal separation from God. Scripture states... *"Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God.... For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" ([Isaiah 59:2](#); [Romans 6:23](#)).*

#3 God's Provision for You... is the Savior.

- —Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins.... *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" ([Romans 5:8](#)).*
- —What can keep you from being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus says... *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" ([John 14:6](#)).*

#4 Your Part... is Surrender.

- —Give Christ control of your life—entrusting yourself to Him.... *"Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross [die to your own self-rule] and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?'" ([Matthew 16:24-26](#)).*
- —Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your "good works" as a means of earning God's approval.... *"It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)).*

The moment you choose to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior—entrusting your life to Him—He comes to live inside you. Then He gives you His power to live the fulfilled life God has planned for you. If you want to be fully forgiven by God and become the person God created you to be, you can tell Him in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

Prayer of Salvation

"God, I want a real relationship with You.

I admit that many times I've chosen to go my own way instead of Your way.

Please forgive me for my sins.

Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins.

Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.

Change me from the inside out and make me the person

You created me to be.

In Your holy name I pray. Amen."

What Can You Expect Now?

If you sincerely prayed this prayer, look at what God says about you!

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." ([2 Peter 1:3-4](#))

IV. STEPS TO SOLUTION

God honors the request of a 20-year-old... and then some.

"Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" ([1 Kings 3:9](#))

Solomon observed the success and failure of his father, King David, and knew that David enjoyed an intimate relationship with God. Now that Solomon has become king, he feels the heavy weight of being the leader and judge of God's people. He confesses his own inadequacies... considering himself a mere child before God... acknowledging his dependence on God for wisdom in resolving the conflicts of his people.

It so pleases the Lord that Solomon asked for a wise and discerning mind that He not only gives him wisdom like no other but also bestows riches and honor on him, as well as the promise of a long life—if he obeys the Lord.

Solomon realized that ruling over God's people demanded divine wisdom. As you face conflict in your life, seek wisdom and guidance from God.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." ([James 1:5](#))

A. Key Verse to Memorize

"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."
([Romans 14:19](#))

B. Key Passage to Read and Reread

Book of [Philemon verses 1-25](#)

7 PRINCIPLES FOR FACING CONFLICT

- #1 **Humility**—Don't use a higher position to take advantage of those in a lower one [vv. 8-9](#)
- #2 **Integrity**—Be absolutely honest about the problems [vv. 10-11](#)
- #3 **Vulnerability**—Share your heart feelings [vv. 12-13](#)
- #4 **Submission**—Don't force an action not under your control [v. 14](#)
- #5 **Optimism**—Expect the best of another [v. 14](#)
- #6 **Faith**—Remember the sovereign hand of God [v. 15-16](#)
- #7 **Exhortation**—Choose your words carefully [v. 21](#)

C. How to Apply First Things First

If two people genuinely love God and care about others, they won't have conflict. Oh, really! Those who haven't read the Bible make this assumption!

Sometimes the conflict is an issue of: "Should they... or shouldn't they?"

For example, some early church leaders were teaching believers that Gentiles had to be circumcised in order for them to be saved in accordance with Old Testament covenant law. However, Paul and Barnabas sharply disagree... and head to Jerusalem to settle the divisive issue.

The apostles and church elders gathered to discuss and debate... and they ultimately determined that circumcision was not a requirement for salvation. *"We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are"* ([Acts 15:11](#)), Peter proclaims.

Two church leaders accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch, carrying an authoritative letter resolving the conflict... They came together divided; they left together united. That's what *conflict resolution* is all about.

The "5 Ws and an H"

#1 **Who?** Who is involved in the conflict?

- —Name those presently involved in the conflict.
- —List those who could be involved to bring about a resolution.

#2 What? What is your goal?

- —Put into writing what you want to accomplish.
- —Be clear. Is this a onetime goal or a long-term goal?

#3 Why? Why do you want to do it?

- —List the reasons for taking action.
- —List what will happen if you do not take action.

#4 Where? Where will it happen?

- —Assess where you assume the conflict could be resolved.
- —Evaluate whether it could happen at another place.

#5 When? When do you want it finished?

- —Establish a time line from beginning to end.
- —List short-term, measurable goals.

#6 How? How do you want it to be done?

- —List the policies and procedures that need to be put in place.
- —List the guidelines needed to accomplish the goal.

"The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out." ([Proverbs 18:15](#))

D. How to Respond When Others Are Critical of You

It happens all the time, even from the earliest years. One child hits another child, and the other child hits back! Human nature says respond "in kind" to others—insult for insult, blow for blow.

Yet one of the clearest challenges of Christ is to not respond "in kind," but to respond "in the Spirit." To be Spirit-controlled rather than situation-controlled is not *natural* to human nature.

Being Spirit-controlled *becomes natural* because of the *new nature* a believer receives at salvation—a new nature with new abilities that creates a new desire to follow Christ's leading. Undoubtedly, to counter evil for evil is natural, but to counter evil with good is the supernatural work of Christ within you....

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." ([Romans 12:21](#))

- **Be discerning** regarding the accuracy of the critical words of others.**PRAY**—"Lord, help me not to accept all critical words as true, nor to reject all words as lies. Enable me to

discern the false from the true. Put a hedge of protection around my mind so that I reject the lies. Allow my heart to accept constructive criticism that You may bring freedom to my life and change me." *"The wise in heart are called discerning, and pleasant words promote instruction"* ([Proverbs 16:21](#)).

- **Be open** to the slightest kernel of truth when you are criticized. **PRAY**—"Lord, if there is any truth in the critical words said about me, please convict my heart so that I might confess it and cooperate with You to change it." *"A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool"* ([Proverbs 17:10](#)).
- **Be willing** to consider the criticism. If it is true, this person is God's megaphone to get your attention. **PRAY**—"Lord, I accept this criticism as Your way of teaching me something I need to know. Please reveal to me what it is You are saying to me through the criticism." *"The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice"* ([Proverbs 12:15](#)).
- **Be able** to receive criticism without being defensive.
 - —Admit to any truth in the criticism.
 - —Agree when you are in error.
 - —Ask for further correction. **PRAY**—"Lord, I admit that I (*state the offense*). I agree that I was wrong. Please continue to use others to put me on a correction course when I'm off track in my attitudes or actions. And please continue to transform me more and more into the likeness of Christ." *"A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise"* ([Proverbs 15:12](#)).
- **Be determined** to speak well of your critic. **PRAY**—"Lord, I yield my tongue to You. I ask that You place a guard over my mouth so that I will speak only the truth in love to (*name*) and will always speak well of (*name*) to others. I pledge to focus on the good in (*name*) and not on the bad." *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse"* ([Romans 12:14](#)).
- **Be dependent** on the Lord's perspective to determine your worth and value, not on the opinions of others. **PRAY**—"Lord, thank You for establishing my worth and value by dying for me and adopting me into Your family. I will not live for the approval of people because I have Your approval, and that is all I need. Thank You for loving me." *"Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ"* ([Galatians 1:10](#)).

E. How to Know the What, Why, and How of Boundaries

Boundaries are *established limits*, lines not to be crossed. When a boundary is exceeded, the result is a *repercussion*. If a boundary is honored, the result is a *reward*. When parents establish boundaries, their children are the ones who choose to go beyond the boundaries or to stay within them. This means that the children, not the parents, are the ones who *choose* the *repercussion* or the *reward*. The same is true when adults establish boundaries with one another as peers, friends, or spouses. This principle is clearly demonstrated when God set a *boundary* with Adam and Eve. In *choosing* to go beyond the boundary God established for them, they *chose* the *consequence* of their sin... they *chose* the *repercussion*....

"To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, "You must not eat of it," Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.'" ([Genesis 3:17](#))

Boundaries are...

- The limits that establish a border (like a curb)
- The realization we are separate from one another
- The basis of our individual identity *"Do to others as you would have them do to you"* ([Luke 6:31](#)).

Boundaries help determine...

- What we are *and* what we are not
- What we will choose *and* what we will not choose
- What we will endure *and* what we will not endure
- What we feel *and* what we do not feel
- What we like *and* what we do not like
- What we want *and* what we do not want

"Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you" ([Proverbs 2:11](#)).

Boundaries help...

- Jesus pronounced, *"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword"* ([Matthew 10:34](#)). Jesus clearly communicates that we must seek to resolve what is wrong by cutting to the heart of the matter.
- Jesus announced that *"the truth will set you free"* ([John 8:32](#)). At certain times, the sword of truth is necessary in order to live a life of integrity and make needed changes.
- When you do what is right in His sight, Jesus will give you His supernatural peace. Although not everything around you is peaceful, He can give you an internal...

"Peace... which transcends all understanding." ([Philippians 4:7](#))

Establishing Boundaries

#1 Do... Communicate your expectations clearly.

- —Get on the person's eye level.
- —Prior to any problems, describe in detail what you expect of the person regarding your relationship.
- —Form an agreement and ask for a statement of the person's understanding of your expectations.
- —When it is time for compliance with your agreement, give a gentle reminder.

Example of Parent to Child:

- **Don't Say:** "Don't you think it is time for you to go to bed now?" **Do Say:** "Remember, we agreed that your bedtime is 8:30. It is 8:20, so what do you need to be doing now?" **Example of Adult to Adult:**
- **Don't Say:** "It is time for you to come home so we won't be late for dinner." **Do Say:** "I'm just calling to let you know I will be ready to serve dinner at six o'clock as we have agreed. If you aren't home by 6:20 or do not call, the children and I will go ahead and eat so they can start their homework."

"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'" ([Matthew 5:37](#))

#2 Do... Establish negative repercussions for breaking an agreement.

- —To establish effective repercussions, know what will make an impact.
- —If possible, choose a repercussion related to the offensive behavior.
- —Clearly communicate the repercussion.
- —Prior to a problem, get the person's agreement to the repercussion.
- —Allow the person to experience the repercussion if the agreement is broken. **Example of Parent to Child:** Tommy, age 10, lives on a busy street. He likes to ride his bicycle with his friend who lives across the street, but he was told never to cross the street without an adult. If Tommy disobeys, the *repercussion* is that he will not be allowed to ride his bicycle the next day. **Example of Adult to Adult:** Joe and Jennifer agree that he will leave work in time to pick her up at home by six o'clock and they will join some friends for dinner at a restaurant across town. The agreement is that Joe will be sure to pick Jennifer up on time since they have reservations and can't be late. If Joe breaks their agreement by being late, the *repercussion* is that Jennifer will go to the restaurant without him even though Joe does not like for them to go places separately.

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." ([Hebrews 12:11](#))

F. What Is the "Recipe" for Conflict Resolution?

When life hands you lemons... make lemonade! If you add the right ingredients, the same transformation may occur in your communication with a loved one. Practice following this easy recipe, and taste the sweetness of resolving painful differences.



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

- **Confront...** The struggler "squeezes all the juice out of the lemon."
 - —When one of you feels sour (hurt, frustrated, or unjustly treated), don't hold it in.
 - —Plan a time to meet with your offender in order to "release the juice from your lemon."(*Name*). I need to talk with you. Is now a good time? (*If not, when?*)"*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven... a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain*" ([Ecclesiastes 3:1, 5](#)).
- **Communicate feelings...** Express your feeling of hurt, anger, fear... by squeezing out your pain in a loving, non-accusatory way.
 - —Share the problem using "I" statements."I'm feeling betrayed. Would you be willing to listen?"
 - —Describe only the upsetting words or behavior without criticizing character.
 - —Don't accuse, belittle, or attack."*Speaking the truth in love.... 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*" ([Ephesians 4:15, 26](#)).
- **Comply...** The listener is a pitcher receiving *all* the juice.
 - —The person being confronted indicates a *willingness to listen* (to receive the rebuke without becoming angry or defensive) and sincerely seeks to hear the speaker's pain.
 - —Respond with a willingness to give undivided attention."Yes, I will listen."
 - —Do not interrupt. Hear the problem to the "last drop."

- —Above all, don't make excuses or become defensive. "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*" ([Ephesians 5:21](#)).
- **Confirm...** The listener fills the pitcher with water with no acidic words.
 - —The listener now *paraphrases the problem back* (repeats what is heard) without reacting negatively.
 - —Affirm what is being said. "You are saying that you felt betrayed last night when I did not defend you? Is this correct?"
 - —Agreement with the facts is not necessary; therefore, do not attempt to justify anything.
 - —Ask if your restating of the problem is correct. If it is not, seek to understand what was said and repeat all.
 - —Ask, "Is there more?" Repeat back and ask these questions again until nothing more is added. "*He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise*" ([Proverbs 15:31](#)).
- **Change...** The struggler asks for "sugar." If the receiver gives the sugar, the entire flavor changes!
 - —After feelings have been delivered and received, the struggler is allowed to *request a change in behavior*. Willingness to listen and change behavior becomes the sweet ingredient for developing intimacy in the relationship.
 - —The struggler makes a request. "When someone criticizes me in front of you, would you be willing to express emotional support by making a comment on my behalf, by walking away, or by asking the person to not talk about me when I'm not present to respond?"
 - —Listener identifies some acceptable responses for use in the future.
 - —Listener is willing to please the other with a commitment to change. "*Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*" ([Philippians 2:4](#)).
- **Comfort...** The listener mixes the sugar and lemon juice well so that there is no hint of the sour lemon. After a change in behavior has been agreed on, the listener expresses sorrow over the struggler's pain and expresses appreciation for the opportunity to resolve the problem.
 - —Address the struggler's pain. "I am so sorry my actions hurt your feelings and caused you to feel betrayed."
 - —Thank the struggler for approaching you.
 - —Appreciate being given a chance to change your behavior in the future in order to improve your relationship. "*A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver*" ([Proverbs 25:11](#)).

G. How to Respond to Difficult Personalities

The Bible records one of the most famous court scenes in history when Solomon is asked to settle a dispute between two new mothers. The dispute concerns two baby boys, one dead and one alive, and the conflicting testimonies of these mothers.

"Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of them said, 'My lord, this woman and I live in the same house. I had a baby while she was there with me. The third day

after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us. During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. The next morning, I got up to nurse my son—and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't the son I had borne.' The other woman said, 'No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours.' But the first one insisted, 'No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine.' And so they argued before the king." ([1 Kings 3:16-22](#))

How is Solomon to know who is telling the truth and who is lying? There is no one to identify the baby boys... no witnesses to testify... no evidence to introduce... and no way to know which baby belongs to which mother. The situation seems impossible to resolve as each mother continues to adamantly claim the living baby as her own.

The wisdom and discernment for which the king prayed is clearly being put to the test—he needs to determine which of the two is the real *snake*.

"The king said, 'This one says, "My son is alive and your son is dead," while that one says, "No! Your son is dead and mine is alive."' Then the king said, 'Bring me a sword.' So they brought a sword for the king." ([1 Kings 3:23-24](#))

Attackers Want to Feel Significant

#1 WolvesGoal: To feel powerful

- —Let them have their say without interrupting.
- —Get their attention with praise.
- —Hold your ground. (Match strength with strength.)
- —Avoid arguments.
- —Don't put yourself down. "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels" ([2 Timothy 2:23](#)).

#2 SnakesGoal: To feel superior

- —Be aware of their power to destroy.
- —Catch them in a lie.
- —Enlist someone to help you confront them in private.
- —Expect them to deny what they have done.
- —Don't let them get away with an attack. "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector" ([Matthew 18:15-17](#)).

#3 HornetsGoal: To feel valuable

- —Learn to cut off negative conversation.
- —Respond only to what is important.
- —Confront their game-playing.
- —Encourage a look at solutions.
- —Don't reinforce their complaints. *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen"* ([Ephesians 4:29](#)).

Avoiders Want to Feel Secure

#1 TurtlesGoal: To feel safe

- —Ask questions that can't be answered with *yes* or *no*.
- —Seek to get them to talk on the feeling-level.
- —Hang in there until you get a response.
- —Be positive, not critical, with them.
- —Don't answer for them. *"A man is praised according to his wisdom, but men with warped minds are despised"* ([Proverbs 12:8](#)).

#2 ChameleonsGoal: To feel accepted

- —Make it "okay" to disagree.
- —Help them identify priorities.
- —Learn their hidden fears.
- —Reinforce their decisions.
- —Don't accept their *yes* as complete agreement. *"An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up"* ([Proverbs 12:25](#)).

#3 Weasels.....Goal: To feel courage

- —Avoid accusations.
- —Don't get drawn into arguments.
- —Be strong and immovable.
- —Be forgiving.
- —Be consistently encouraging. *"As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses... in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left"* ([2 Corinthians 6:4, 7](#)).

H. How to Travel the Road to Resolution

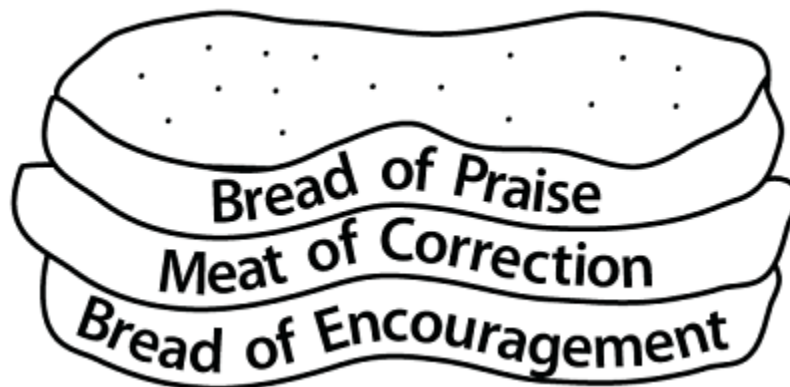
Some conflicts are not easily resolved, but rather require extraordinary discernment. Case in point: 2 new mothers with 2 new babies—1 alive and 1 dead. Both women appear before King Solomon and claim to be the mother of the same child. So... how does the king determine the truth in order to settle the conflict?

Solomon calls for a sword. He will render a fair resolution. And the king's strategy works....

"He then gave an order: 'Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.' The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her son and said to the king, 'Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!' But the other said, 'Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!' Then the king gave his ruling: 'Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother.'" (1 Kings 3:25-27)

As you prepare to walk the road to resolution of a conflict, remember to...

- **Pledge** your commitment.
 - —"I am committed to this relationship."
 - —"I am committed to reconciliation, if at all possible." *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone"* ([Romans 12:18](#)).
- **Pray** for yourself.
 - —"Am I seeing the true issue?"
 - —"Reveal any personal error I need to face."
 - —"Prepare the heart of (name) to be open." *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"* ([Psalm 139:23-24](#)).
- **Prepare** before you ask for a meeting.
 - —Discern the root cause of the conflict.
 - —Examine your expectations.
 - —Decide on positive solutions.
 - —Use the "Sandwich Technique." *"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD"* ([Lamentations 3:40](#)).



- **Propose** a time to talk face-to-face.
 - —"I care about our relationship. Is it possible for us to have some time to talk?"
 - —"I feel there are some unresolved issues that need to be dealt with positively." *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"* ([Ephesians 4:3](#)).
- **Provide** a private place.
 - —Away from people

- —Away from distractions "*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over*" ([Matthew 18:15](#)).
- **Purpose** to be honest.
 - —Take responsibility for your actions.
 - —See the other person's viewpoint. "*A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies*" ([Proverbs 12:17](#)).
- **Permit** total forgiveness.
 - —Choose to forgive any hurts.
 - —Don't mentally rehearse the faults of the other.
 - —Allow God to reestablish a bond of love. "*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity*" ([Colossians 3:13-14](#)).
- **Perceive** a future harvest.
 - —You are sowing seeds that may not take root until later.
 - —Change is a process.
 - —What you sow, you reap! "*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up*" ([Galatians 6:9](#)).
- **Present** the present conflict.
 - —Don't bring up the past.
 - —Keep the conversation on the present conflict. "*[Love]... keeps no record of wrongs*" ([1 Corinthians 13:5](#)).
- **Promote** fairness and objectivity.
 - —Avoid generalizations.
 - —Mention both positives and negatives. "*Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly*" ([Leviticus 19:15](#)).
- **Protect** one another's privacy.
 - —Don't involve outsiders.
 - —Control your tongue when you are with other people. "*A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret*" ([Proverbs 11:13](#)).
- **Preserve** individuality.
 - —Value differences in goals, desires, and priorities.
 - —Don't demand like-thinking. "*I too will have my say; I too will tell what I know*" ([Job 32:17](#)).
- **Project** openness and optimism.
 - —Exhibit positive body language.
 - —Use "I" statements and make good eye contact. "*Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing*" ([1 Thessalonians 5:11](#)).
- **Practice** love.
 - —End with an appropriate physical expression: firm handshake, hug, or a pat on the back.
 - —Express appreciation, care, and love. "*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity*" ([Proverbs 17:17](#)).

I. How to Forgive When Conflict Is Not Resolved

Forgiveness is not contingent on resolution, nor is it based on feelings. Forgiveness is a choice—a choice to do what God tells you to do. Realize that when Jesus was being crucified on the cross at the hands of the Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers, He said...

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." ([Luke 23:34](#))

He knew they hadn't changed. If you don't forgive, you will develop a root of bitterness and a bitter root will grow bitter fruit.... You will become bitter.

Most important of all, you are to forgive because Jesus said...

"If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." ([Matthew 6:14-15](#))

How to Handle "The Hook"

- Make a list of all the offenses caused by your offender.
- Imagine right now a meat hook around your neck and a burlap bag hanging from the hook in front of you. And imagine all the pain caused by the offenses against you—like 100 pounds of heavy rocks, rocks of resentment—in the burlap bag hanging from the hook.
- Ask yourself, *Do I really want to carry all that pain with me for the rest of my life?* Are you willing to take the pain from the past and release it into His hands?
- If so, right now, take the one who offended you off of your emotional hook and place your offender onto God's hook. The Lord knows how to deal with your offender... in His time and in His way. God says...

"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord." ([Romans 12:19](#))

Prayer to Forgive Your Offender

"Lord Jesus, thank You for caring about how much my heart has been hurt. You know the pain I have felt because of (*list every offense*). Right now I release all that pain into Your hands. Thank You, Lord, for dying on the cross for me and extending Your forgiveness to me. As an act of my will, I choose to forgive (*name*). Right now, I take him off of my emotional hook, and I place him onto Your hook. I refuse all thoughts of revenge. I trust that in Your time and in Your way You will deal with him as You see fit. And Lord, thank You for giving me Your power to forgive so that I can be set free. In Your precious name I pray. Amen."

J. How to Keep Forgiving Following a Major Conflict

You may need to repeatedly extend forgiveness for a major offense. Forgiving again and again is just part of the *process of forgiveness*. As you consistently release each recurring thought of an

offense, eventually the thoughts will stay away. The process will be complete.... The fight will be won. Jesus emphasized the "again and again" nature of forgiveness when He said...

"If he [your brother] sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:4)

How to Forgive... Again

(The following is an acrostic on FORGIVENESS.)

F-FORBID recurring thoughts of the wrongs to enter your mind. Stop them as soon as they occur. Boldly say to yourself, "I refuse to keep a record of this.... I refuse to keep a ledger."

"It [Love] keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

O-OVERCOME the temptation to bring up the matter again. After there has been honest confrontation with the offender and both sides of the situation have been dealt with or if the other person refuses to talk about the problem, let the Holy Spirit do His work of conviction. [Ecclesiastes 3:7](#) says, "[There is] a time to be silent and a time to speak." Pray this passage...

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

R-REPEAT Scripture in your mind. Allow God's perspective to change your perspective. Allow God's heart to permeate your heart. At times of testing, repeat over and over, "Love covers this wrong. Lord, may I be an expression of Your love. May I reflect Your love that covers over all wrongs."

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

G-GIVE the situation to God. Jesus understands how much you have been wronged. When He was being persecuted, Jesus knew that the heavenly Father would judge justly... in His way, in His time. And you can know the same. Your trial will make you either bitter or better. Say to the Lord, "I put my heart into Your hands.... I entrust myself to You. I know You will judge this situation justly." These words were said about Jesus...

"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).

I-INTERCEDE on behalf of your offender. God does not present prayer as an option for you; it is a command. When you have been wronged, pray, "Lord, give me eyes to see him through Your eyes.... May I care for her with Your care...."

"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" ([Luke 6:28](#)).

V-VALUE what you can give rather than what you can receive. Pray for God to help you understand the offender's past and how his or her inner pain has contributed to the injury you are now experiencing. Focus on how you might meet some of these inner needs, for it is more blessed to give than to receive.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" ([Acts 20:35](#)).

E-EXTEND God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Forgiveness is a direct expression of both God's grace and God's mercy. Grace is getting what you don't deserve (pardon). Mercy is not getting what you do deserve (punishment). Pray often: "Lord, may my life be an expression of Your grace and an extension of Your mercy."

"The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" ([James 5:11](#)).

K. How to Turn Foes into Friends

Imagine the angst. It hurts when your own people are talking against you. His foes were from his family heritage... and Paul's heart is pained by the persecution.

Paul longs to see his Jewish brethren come to faith in Christ, to soften their hearts toward the true Messiah and Savior. But they are his major opposition, as he aptly testifies: *"I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews"* ([Acts 20:19](#)).

But Paul's prayers... love... and faithful proclamation of the Gospel... turned some of the Jews from foes into friends—they became fellow believers in the Lord Jesus. But it was all based on the caring way he treated them. He cared with the compassion of Christ....

"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race." ([Romans 9:2-3](#))

F - FIND ways to compliment your opposer.

- —Look for and express positive character traits that your opposer possesses.
- —Don't focus on complimentary externals such as clothes, hair, good looks.
- —Express a sincere compliment at an appropriate time. "I've noticed (how effectively you spoke... worked... sang), and I really admire that."*"The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just"* ([Psalm 37:30](#)).

R - REPAY your opposer's evil with good.

- —Look for and extend acts of kindness.
- —Commit to God that you will not act negatively, like your opposer has.
- —Do not talk about your opposer in a demeaning way to others. *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody"* ([Romans 12:17](#)).

I - INTERCEDE in prayer for your opposer.

- —Ask God to reveal your opposer's real needs.
- —Seek the Lord's perspective on the differences between you and your opposer.
- —Commit to praying for your opposer every time that person comes to mind. *"Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right"* ([1 Samuel 12:23](#)).

E - EMPATHIZE with your opposer.

- —Learn about the past hurts and hardships your opposer has experienced.
- —Get in touch with your feelings as you think about your own hurts and hardships.
- —Allow yourself to feel compassion as you identify with your opposer. *"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn"* ([Romans 12:15](#)). *"Live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble"* ([1 Peter 3:8](#)).

N - NURTURE a forgiving heart toward your opposer.

- —Realize, you too have wounded others.
- —Remember, you too stand in need of forgiveness.
- —Pray for God to give you a willingness to forgive just as He was willing to forgive you. *"When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins"* ([Mark 11:25](#)).

D - DECIDE to love your opposer.

- —See yourself as a conduit of God's love.
- —Look for tangible ways to express love on a continual basis.
- —Keep focusing on "What is in the best interest of my opposer" ... and then do it. *"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law"* ([Romans 13:8](#)).

S - SEEK to meet the needs of your opposer.

- —Reach out—look for what is especially meaningful to your opposer (such as reaching out to one of that person's loved ones).
- —Reach out—invite your opposer to attend an event with you that you know that person would like.

- —Reach out—take food to your opposer when you hear that person is sick or has lost a loved one. "*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head*" ([Romans 12:20](#)).

When you are faced with conflict,
passivity is not the real path to peace.
Conflict resolution rests in confronting wrong
with the heart of Christ.
Since Jesus is the Prince of Peace,
regardless of the response,
you can be at peace....
So, rest in His peace.
—June Hunt

Answers to questions from Section II. starting on page 12:

Who Displays Which Style of Conflict in Scripture?

Eve:

She is an avoider, a weasel.

She tried to weasel out of accepting responsibility for her wrong choices by blaming the serpent.

Cain:

He is an attacker, a wolf.

He became angry when God chastised him regarding his offering.

The Philistines:

They are attackers, wolves.

They were predators waiting to conquer their prey—Samson.

Delilah:

She is an attacker, a snake.

She accepted a bribe from the Philistines to trap Samson.

Samson:

He is an avoider, a chameleon.

He told the secret of his strength just to please Delilah.

King Saul:

He is an attacker, a wolf.

He was jealous of David.

King David:

He is an avoider, a turtle.

He sought to keep his affair with Bathsheba a secret from her husband, Uriah.

The Pharisees:

They are attackers, snakes.

They sought to control everyone with laws. They accused Jesus of blasphemy.

Pilate:

He is an avoider, a chameleon.

He knew that Jesus was innocent, yet condemned Him to death to please the crowd.

Judas:

He is an attacker, a snake.

He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Martha:

She is an attacker, a hornet.

She complained to Jesus about her sister Mary.

Peter:

He is an avoider, a turtle.

He denied ever knowing Jesus.

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Memory Verse Cards

Print out cards with [relevant Bible verses](#) for easy memorization.

Biblical Counseling Keys - Biblical Counseling Keys – Conflict Resolution: Solving Your People Problems.