



WEEK SEVEN: CONFLICT THE PATH TO GROWTH

Whether we like it or not, conflict is a part of every significant relationship in our lives. Unfortunately, we often don't handle it well. Rather than dealing with it in a healthy way that leads to growth, we often prefer to ignore the issue, gossip, withdraw, or attack. However, if we want to learn to love others well and to deepen our relationships, we need to learn how to move toward conflict in a healthy way. This isn't easy, but it is essential if we want to learn to love as Jesus loved.

This week we will study several important passages of Scripture that explore this topic. We will also read selections from *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them* and *How to Have That Difficult Conversation You've Been Avoiding*. Before starting your study, you may want to download the excerpt from *How to Have That Difficult Conversation You've Been Avoiding* ("The Benefits of a Good Conversation"). To do so, simply go to Week 7 on the lovingpeople.rockypeak.org website and click on "Download Resource."

DAY ONE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Matthew 5:21-24
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 23-24 and 127-131
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the human tendency to attack or withdraw

◆ EXPLORE

As you start the study this week, ask the Holy Spirit to teach and empower you to move toward conflict in new ways. Then read **Matthew 5:21-24** in the New Living Translation (NLT) and answer the following questions. (You can find this on YouVersion.)

- 1) How would you summarize Jesus' teaching about anger and conflict in this passage?
- 2) One detail we often don't take into account when we read this passage is that there was only one Jewish temple—and it was all the way in Jerusalem. That means if you lived near the Sea of Galilee (where Jesus was teaching this message), it was about a 170-mile roundtrip to the temple. Depending on your speed, this means it would take anywhere from eight days to two weeks (or more) to make this trip! With this in mind, reread Jesus' instructions in **Matthew 5:23-24**. What would Jesus' instructions require if the person who had something against you lived back in Galilee?
- 3) Put yourself in the shoes of Jesus' original listeners. How do you think you would have felt the first time you heard Jesus teach this lesson in Galilee?
- 4) What implications does this teaching have on the way we should view conflict in our lives?

◆ READ

Read pages 23-24 and pages 127-131 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. Start at the heading *Attack and Withdraw* and stop at the heading *The Dance of the Porcupines* (Audible ch. 1: 22:44-27:41). Then start at the heading *The Art of Handling Conflict* and stop at the heading *I Must Own Responsibility* (Audible ch. 4: 43:52-58:08).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) In the reading today, John writes,

Dallas Willard writes that assault and withdrawal are the two essential forms of relational sin. We assault others when we act against what is good for them. ... We withdraw from someone when we regard their well-being as a matter of indifference to us. Attack and withdrawal are practiced by every human being on earth, and they damage every marriage and family and workplace and church.

At root, they are two expressions of the one great sin, which is a lack of love, the violation of the one great commandment. All of our relational mismanagement is really a variation on these two tendencies of the fallen human heart. When we feel threatened, we want to hurt others or hide from them.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 24

Which of these two forms of “relational sin”—attack or withdrawal—comes most naturally to you in conflict situations? Please explain.

2) In Chapter 7, John writes,

It is both remarkable and appalling that by and large in churches today we are not scandalized by broken relationships and chronic enmity between people. ... We are not scandalized by lack of love.

But Jesus is. Love was His supreme value. His summation of the total teaching of divine revelation is captured in that single word: love for God, and love for people. Therefore, the greatest crimes against the kingdom of God are crimes against love. To slander another human being, to carry a grudge against someone who I think hurt me, to gossip about someone I have not even confronted—these are direct violations of Jesus' fundamental command. Yet these behaviors go on all the time—even in churches. We are not shocked by them. We would be shocked if they suddenly ceased.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, pgs. 127-128

Why do you think we are often not “scandalized” by these kinds of relational sins?

How would the church be different if these sins were dealt with properly?

3) In this chapter, John introduces a seven-step process for resolving conflict. The first step is to **Acknowledge Conflict**. (You can find this on pages 130-131 or Audible ch. 4: 56:06-58:08.) How would you summarize this first step in your own words?

4) What is the most important insight you gained today from Jesus' teaching or the reading? Write it down in your journal and then process it with Jesus in prayer.

DAY TWO

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Matthew 18:15-17
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 131-137
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the first three steps toward resolving conflict

◆ EXPLORE

Read **Matthew 18:15-17** in the New Living Translation (NLT), and then answer the following questions. (You can find this on YouVersion.)

- 1) Is there anything that surprises you in this passage?
- 2) What specific steps does Jesus tell us to take when resolving conflict with other believers? List them as bullet points in your journal.
- 3) Why do you think Jesus tells us to start the process by going to the person one-on-one?

◆ READ

Read pages 131-137 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. Start at the heading *I Must Own Responsibility* and stop at the heading *No Third Parties* (Audible ch. 4: 58:08 – ch. 5: 07:01).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) Yesterday we learned that our first step towards resolving conflict is to acknowledge it. Today we learned that the second step is: **I must own responsibility**. (You can find this on p. 131 or Audible ch. 4: 58:08-1:00:06.)

On this second step, John writes,

*Interestingly, while Jesus tells His hearers they should take the responsibility to set things right if the other person has sinned, in another setting He tells His hearers to take the first step if **they** are the ones in the wrong. Jesus puts the burden on you in both cases. If **you've** done something wrong, take the first step, He says; if the other person has done something wrong, you still take the first step.*

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 132

Does this surprise you?

Have you ever refused to go to someone to discuss a conflict because you felt like it was their responsibility to come to you? If so, explain.

2) The third step for resolving conflict is: **Approach, don't avoid, the person you are in conflict with.** (You can find this on page 132 or Audible ch. 4: 1:00:06 – ch. 5: 07:01.) Why do you think it's often hard to take this step?

3) On the topic of approaching conflict, John writes,

This is a huge step. It is important to remember that when you approach the other person, you may not even do it well. You may stutter and stammer and stumble over your words. Don't let that stop you. It is important to try to use as much skill and wisdom as you can. If you wait until you can do it perfectly, you will never go at all. Doing it flawlessly is not the main concern. The main thing is to go.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 132

Have you ever been slow to confront someone simply because you weren't sure of the best way to do it? If so, explain.

4) Read the following quotes from John on the topic of anger.

• Anger is like a smoke detector: It's very good to have one. When it buzzes, it signals that something needs to be fixed. ... Anger exists to tell you something is wrong and to move you to action. Anger exists so you will be motivated to make it go away.

• However, taking wise action while you are angry is exceedingly difficult. As the arousal level goes up, you suffer what therapists often call "cognitive incapacitation." You can't think straight. Anger produces what might be called the Jim Carrey effect: As you get mad and madder, you get dumb and dumber.

• Remember how you learned in grade school that red, blue, and yellow are primary colors and that other colors can be made from a mixture of them? In a similar way, anger is not a primary emotion. It is virtually always the result of a mixture of other emotions, such as hurt, frustration, or fear. If we want to manage anger constructively, we need to step back and ask what is underneath the anger. Otherwise, we are not dealing with the root cause.

• It is an amazing dynamic: Once people get to a certain level of anger, their only focus is to win an argument or to inflict pain or to get away. ... To become a champion of anger management, you must become aware of your thoughts and begin to think different thoughts.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, pgs. 133, 134 and 135, in order

Which of these quotes do you like the most, and why?

How would you summarize their teaching about anger and how to respond to it in conflict situations?

5) On pages 134-135, John tells us there are two key questions we should ask before a confrontation (Audible ch. 5: 00:16-03:02). What are these two questions and how would you explain them in your own words?

6) Take a few minutes to journal and pray through any important insights you've gained today.

DAY THREE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Acts 6:1-7
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, pgs. 137-144
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the final four steps for resolving conflict

◆ EXPLORE

One of the first major conflicts that came up in the early church at Jerusalem involved their food distribution program for poor widows. Read what happened in **Acts 6:1-7** in the Message (MSG) and then answer the following questions. (You can find this in YouVersion.)

- 1) What was happening in the church when this conflict first started?
- 2) What was the conflict, and who was the conflict between?
- 3) How did the apostles resolve the conflict?
- 4) What impact did this rapid resolution have on the church as a whole?
- 5) How did the apostles model the first three steps of the conflict resolution process we have been studying this week? You can find these three steps on pages 130-137 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them* (Audible ch. 4: 56:06 – ch. 5: 7:01).

◆ READ

Read pages 137-144 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. Start at the heading *No Third Parties* and stop at the heading *Learning To Dance* (Audible ch. 5: 07:01-23:35).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) The fourth step for resolving conflict is: “**No third parties.**” (You can find this on page 137 or Audible ch. 5: 07:01-13:07.)

On this topic, John writes,

Go directly to the other person involved, Jesus says. As a general rule, I don't want to go to the person I'm having the conflict with. That's the last person I want to go to.

I want to go to someone else, and say, "Let me tell you what's going on here. I just want to lay it out objectively and get some feedback from a neutral third party. Don't you share my concerns about this person, who

is my brother in Christ and a deeply disturbed psychopath?"

It's more fun to go to someone else. I can commiserate with the third party.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 137

Why do you think it is often so tempting to discuss a conflict with a third party—rather than with the person we are having the conflict with?

2) John writes,

The litmus test of spirituality is not the absence of conflict; conflict will not disappear until we die. The litmus test is how we handle it.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 138

Do you agree that how we handle conflict is a "litmus test" of our spirituality? Why, or why not?

3) The fifth step for resolving conflict is: "**Use sensitivity.**" (You can find this on page 139 or Audible ch. 5: 13:07-18:16.) How would you summarize this step with two or three bullet points?

4) The sixth step for resolving conflict is: "**Direct communication.**" (You can find this on page 142 or Audible ch. 5: 18:16-20:51.) Briefly summarize this step in a sentence or two.

5) The seventh step for resolving conflict is: "**Aim at reconciliation.**" (You can find this on page 143 or Audible ch. 5: 20:51-23:35.)

On this step, John writes,

The goal in conflict situations is not to win or score points—it's reconciliation. Your aim should be to restore the relationship. Reconciliation is rarely simple and almost never quick. But it is Jesus' will for the human race. It is His express command for the church. If this is not the goal, all the rest of our work will be for nothing.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 143

What are the implications for the attitude we need to bring to any confrontation?

6) Turn to pages 130-144 (Audible ch. 4: 56:06 – ch. 5: 23:35). Take a couple of minutes to review John's seven steps for reconciliation. Write a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to help you practice these steps in your relationships.

DAY FOUR

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Galatians 5:16-23
- ◆ **READ:** “The Benefits of a Good Conversation,” pgs. 20-24
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On how healthy conflict can strengthen your relationships

◆ EXPLORE

Today we will explore a passage of Scripture that describes our fallen human nature and how it leads to destructive conflict in our relationships. Put your “relational glasses” on and read **Galatians 5:16-23** in the New Living Translation (NLT). (You can find this in YouVersion.) Then answer the following questions.

- 1) In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul lists several attitudes, actions, and emotions that flow out of our fallen human nature. List these characteristics as bullet points in your journal.
- 2) Review this list. Circle the attitudes, actions, or emotions that lead to destructive conflict in our relationships.
- 3) In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul lists the attitudes, actions, and emotions the Holy Spirit creates in us. Make a bulleted list of these characteristics.
- 4) Review the list. Circle the attitudes, actions, and emotions that lead to harmony in our relationships.
- 5) What is the secret to building healthy relationships according to this passage?

◆ READ

Read pages 20-24 in “The Benefits of A Good Conversation.” This is an excerpt from the book *How to Have That Difficult Conversation You’ve Been Avoiding* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Start at the beginning of the chapter and stop at the heading *Empowering*. (You can download this PDF by going to Week 7 on the lovingpeople.rockypeak.org website and clicking on “Download Resource.”)

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle or quote from this reading, and why?

2) In today's reading, Drs. Cloud and Townsend write,

*Probably the most important benefit of a good confrontation is that it **preserves love** in the relationship. This may seem counterintuitive to you. You may think, "This doesn't make any sense. When I confront someone, they will either get mad or leave the relationship." This can and does happen. But confrontation was not designed to make someone angry or chase him or her away. In fact, it was designed to do the opposite. ... In confrontation, people simply face the relationship and deal with an aspect of the connection that needs to be addressed. The intent is to make the relationship better, to deepen the intimacy, and to create more love and respect between two people.*

*That is why to be an effective confronter, you need to understand that **confrontation works best when it serves love**. Boundary conversations are motivated and driven by love. They promote the purposes of love. They enhance a relationship, not end it.*

-How to Have That Difficult Conversation You've Been Avoiding, p. 21

How would you explain the relationship between confrontation and love?

3) Consider this quote from today's reading:

The extent to which two people in a relationship can bring up and resolve issues is a critical marker of the soundness of the relationship.

-How to Have That Difficult Conversation You've Been Avoiding, pgs. 22-23

Do you agree or disagree with this conclusion? Why or why not?

4) Later in today's reading, Drs. Cloud and Townsend write,

*Two people meeting to have the talk is the first step toward ending alienation. **A boundary conversation is, in and of itself, a connection.** The two are bringing their differences to the light of relationship and seeing what can be done. This might not be pleasant, but it is far better than a relationship that is a living death, where feelings of hurt, anger, conflicted love, and sadness never go away. Not talking about strong feelings doesn't make them go away; in fact, they become more pronounced in our attempts to live as if they don't exist.*

-How to Have That Difficult Conversation You've Been Avoiding, p. 24

Have you ever experienced a relationship that became a "living death" because one or both of the parties were not able to confront important issues threatening their relationship? If so, explain.

5) What is your biggest takeaway from today's study? Take a few minutes to journal your insights and pray about what you're learning.

DAY FIVE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Proverbs 15:31, 27:5-6
- ◆ **READ:** “The Benefits of a Good Conversation,” pgs. 26-31
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On how confrontation can lead to healthier relationships

◆ EXPLORE

Read **Proverbs 15:31** and **Proverbs 27:5-6** in the New International Version (NIV). Then answer the following questions.

- 1) Which is your favorite proverb, and why?
- 2) How would you summarize the message of these proverbs?
- 3) Have you ever had someone confront you over an issue that was painful at the time—but later led to growth in your life and in the relationship? If so, explain.

◆ READ

Read pages 26-31 in “The Benefits of A Good Conversation” PDF that you downloaded yesterday. Start at the heading *Solving a Problem* and stop at the heading *Our Other Motives*.

◆ REFLECT

1) What was your favorite principle, insight, or quote from today’s reading, and why?

2) In today’s reading, Drs. Cloud and Townsend write,

*When you expose problems to the light of relationships, it is far more likely that things will improve than when you ignore or deny them. Problems don’t tend to go away by themselves over time. They often get worse. And that is the converse principle here: **What is ignored tends not to be solved.***

-How to Have That Difficult Conversation You’ve Been Avoiding, p. 26

Can you think of a relationship in your life that illustrates this principle? If so, explain.

3) They go on to write,

Part of the uniqueness of a boundary conversation is that it has a focus and an agenda. It is not a generalized dissatisfaction with a person; rather, it points out some specific issue that is driving two people apart. People who confront well make a clear request for change from the other person; ... The emphasis is not on renovating the entire person—which can be overwhelming—but on solving a specific problem.

-How to Have That Difficult Conversation You've Been Avoiding, p. 26

How would you summarize this principle in your own words?

4) In today's reading, Drs. Cloud and Townsend point out that confrontation is our responsibility as Christ-followers. By not addressing the issue, we become part of the problem. Have you ever confronted someone when they were off track—and they eventually thanked you for it? If so, explain.

5) Take a couple of minutes and reflect on what you've learned today. Journal your insights and spend some time processing them with Jesus in prayer.

WEEKEND MESSAGE REFLECTION

After you listen to the seventh message in this series (*Conflict... The Path To Growth*), answer the following questions.

1) What was your favorite insight, principle, illustration, or quote from this week's message, and why?

2) This weekend, Michael shared the seven steps of a "clarifying conversation." Which step was most helpful to you, and why?

3) Do you sense the Holy Spirit encouraging you to have a clarifying conversation with anyone in your life right now? If so, explain.