

Little Times of
Trouble

“Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Eph. 4:26, NKJV).



No family is perfect, as represented in the first family with Cain and Abel. This was the conflict that arose between the first siblings of humanity.

Introduction

War of the Bucket

Matt. 23:24

The year was 1325 in picturesque northern Italy. Two cities, Bologna and Modena, were in a bitter rivalry fueled through their political and religious differences. There had been several years of conflict already, but then the unthinkable happened—a wooden bucket was stolen from the bottom of the city well in Bologna.

The audacity, to steal the town's well bucket!

A small group of Modena soldiers had secretly slipped into the middle of Bologna and managed to steal the oaken bucket from the bottom of the town's water well. The audacity, to steal the town's well bucket! The folks of Bologna, on discovering the missing bucket, did what any rational civic leaders or citizens would do when their dignity was hurt. They assembled thirty-two thousand soldiers and marched against Modena in an act of war! The Modenese met them with seven thousand of their own soldiers and promptly routed the Bolognese, albeit with several thousand casualties on both sides. Apparently to this day an ancient wooden bucket is still kept in the town of Modena as a memorial. Yes, they won the war over the oaken bucket, but at what cost?

In our family relations, how often does the story of conflict follow a similar tale? Small differences develop between those relationally or geographically close to us, and the differences begin to agitate and grow until an all-out war is declared, usually over something of little value! Jesus in Matthew 23:24 reminded us: "Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" (NKJV). He pointed out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who were zealous not to eat gnats (an unclean insect) while at the same time consuming an entire camel (also unclean). In the previous verse, Jesus referred to weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faith, implying that there are big things and small things in God's sight. We humans instead maximize the minor things and minimize the major things.

This week explores what the Bible says about dealing with conflict and living in peace. Jesus presents a clear path to us that helps us focus on the really important thing—true love—and put in proper perspective things of lesser consequence. Being a disciple of Jesus is about submitting oneself, esteeming others better than yourself, being willing to go the extra mile, doing good to our enemies, and even surrendering our "rights" (Matt. 5:44; Phil. 2:3; Col. 3:18). These attitudes aren't popular, but as Christians, it's all about following Jesus' example.

And it all starts in the family—with me.

Keith LaRoy, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Eph. 4:26, 27

Evidence *Is Anger Bad?*

I've yet to attend a church where there aren't at least two people angry at each other. In fact, I'm yet to meet any group of people, regardless of their relational arrangement, that doesn't have conflicts and tensions being navigated, either outrightly or behind the scenes. Whether it's a small business team, a punk rock band, or a nice Christian family, it's only a matter of spending enough time around them until the relational tensions start to reveal themselves. At the center of most of these tensions, especially those of a higher magnitude, anger is prevalent.

In the face of injustice and oppression, God is often explained to be experiencing anger.

Human psychologists have often stated that anger and conflict are not intrinsically negative; in fact, they're a necessary component to healthy relationships. The thing is, it's those who know how to be angry and how to express that anger in healthy ways that find connection instead of repulsion during their conflicts. You could say they find ways to have conflict that deepens intimacy instead of conflict that removes intimacy.

Thinking about it, isn't it God who embedded anger into our human psyche? So Paul says, "Be angry, and do not sin" (Eph. 4:26, NKJV). He seems to be making a definitional separation between anger and sin; they are two separate and different items in which one can be embraced without the presence of the other.

The Greek word that is translated "anger" is *orgizō*, which means "to provoke or enrage." It's a word describing an emotion experienced not only by us as humanity but by God Himself. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments it's not uncommon to see God experience this intense emotional state. In the face of injustice and oppression, God is often portrayed as experiencing anger, feeling a deep-seated displeasure at the cruel acts done toward the poor and weak.

With that in mind, it's proper to sometimes feel anger; it's as valid an emotion as joy. But we don't have to allow anger to cause us to become careless and hurtful. Instead, we can find ways to express that anger in a healthy, relationship-building way.

REACT

1. What is your opinion on conflict? Is it negative?
2. Is it even possible to express anger in a healthy way? If so, how?
3. Do you agree that anger is a God-given emotion? If not, why not?

Askim Chundu, Lacombe, Alberta, Canada

Logos

Strong Families

Gen. 2:7, 21–25; 3:1;
 Matt. 7:1, 2;
 Rom. 3:23;
 Eph. 6:10–18;
 Phil. 2:4–8;
 Col. 3:18–21;
 Heb. 12:14

The First Family (Gen. 2:7, 21–25; 3:1)

Imagine the perfect man—handsome, strong, brilliant leader, gentle, and loving. Adam was all of this and so much more. From this perfect man, God took a rib and formed a woman. She was the apple of Adam's eye, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh (Gen. 2:23). Yet into this perfection, sin and conflict entered when the devil showed up in disguise in Eden.

As much as Adam loved Eve, he should have loved God even more. When she brought him the fruit to eat, he had a choice to make: listen to his wife or obey God. The right choice would have been to obey God and trust Him with the consequences. Regardless of how close-knit our families are, our primary allegiance ought to be to God.

When God is disappointed in a relationship, He offers Himself as the resolution to the conflict.

Conflict in Relationships (Col. 3:18–21)

When Adam and Eve sinned, God had every reason to be upset with them. He had placed them in a perfect setting with every need and want supplied. Furthermore, He had warned them of the devil's ploy to derail them. They had each other to keep accountable and encourage to remain faithful to God. So we could anticipate that their decision to eat of the forbidden fruit would anger any reasonable being. But how did God react?

God descended upon the Garden of Eden in gentle pursuit of His defectors. After questioning them, He proceeded to offer a solution to their self-inflicted debacle—He would send His only begotten Son to die for humanity so that anyone who wanted salvation could have it. When God is disappointed in a relationship, He offers Himself as the resolution to the conflict. Thus we see a clear distinction between anger and sin. Though God gets angry, He never sins.

By contrast, anytime conflict arises in our relationships, we are the first to go on the defensive. This is precisely what Adam and Eve did. Adam blamed God and Eve, and Eve, in turn, blamed God and the serpent. Blaming does not resolve the conflict. In fact, it serves only to exacerbate a dire situation, increasing the rift between those in the relationship.

The next time we find ourselves in conflict with family members, let us learn from God's example. Instead of thinking of ways to defend our-

selves at the expense of others, let us think of how to mend the brokenness at the root of the conflict. It will require a selfless attitude, a willingness to incur personal hurt, and greater regard for our fellow humans than for ourselves.

If we are honest with ourselves, we do not possess the kind of selfless love that it takes to resolve conflicts in God's way. But that is why we need Jesus to transform us to be like Him!

Rising Above Yielding to Sin (Matt. 7:1, 2; Heb. 12:14; Rom. 3:23; Phil. 2:4–8)

Beyond overcoming conflict, though, it would be ideal to avoid it altogether. That was God's goal in warning Adam and Eve about eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Although it was planned from the foundation of the world (cf. Rev. 13:8), the death of Christ on the cross to save us from sin was not God's ideal (cf. 1 John 2:1a). Now that sin has entered the world, God's salvation is not only about forgiving wrongdoing but also about helping us to avoid falling into sin (cf. Jude 24).

"Whatsoever things are lovely"; "judge not"; "follow peace with all men" (Phil. 4:8; Matt. 7:1, 2; Heb. 12:14): these are just a few of God's counsels that are useful to avoid conflict. If we consider our own faults and see the bright side of the situation, we can leverage conflict and move the relationship forward.

Your Weapons in Conflict (Eph. 6:10–18)

When conflicts do arise, it is crucial that we understand what we are up against. There is a larger struggle at play—the great controversy. Adam may not have fully realized the broad ramifications of his decision to eat of the fruit, but that one choice is what has brought us to this place in history. Similarly, the way we handle conflict in our lives has the potential to bless or curse others to an extent that we cannot fully fathom.

The devil entered the perfection of Eden, a specific geographic location on earth, and in one conversation left the whole world desolate and tainted with conflict. Just this one example shows us the massive loss we can experience if we enter conflict with just pure emotion.

In light of the weight of our choices, the Bible counsels us to fight our battles with spiritual weapons (Eph. 6:11). Our swords are not hurtful words but the Word of God. Our protective gear is not defective blaming but the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation. Moreover, we must approach every situation prayerfully, recognizing our own deficiency and God's sufficiency to reconcile any possible schisms.

REACT

1. What does selflessness in the midst of conflict look like?
2. How may I apply prayer to overcome in times of conflict?

Elaine Thompson, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Testimony *Angry Choices*

Matt. 5:21–23; 21;
Eph. 4:26, 27

One of the hardest things for me to do as a Christian has been to control my temper. Anger was my comfort food. In the midst of distress I would hold on to anger, begging it to solve all my problems, and it never provided positive results. After being frustrated with this cycle of being angry and making bad decisions, I began searching Scripture for a solution and came across Matthew 5:21–23. Here Jesus warns that if you are angry with your neighbor, you are subject to judgment. This resulted in an internal predicament, for how can being angry result in judgment when Jesus was angry in Matthew 21?

Like many things in this life, anger can be used as a gateway to sin.

After wrestling with the notion that anger results in judgment and studying my Bible, I came across Paul's words that clarified this issue. In Ephesians 4:26, 27, Paul writes, "And 'don't sin by letting anger control you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil" (NLT). Like many things in this life, anger can be used as a gateway to sin. If we allow anger to fester, we become blind to the will of God and overwhelmed with the desire to satisfy our anger. Through these verses, I learned that holding on to anger doesn't result in solutions; it results in my leaning on my own understanding rather than leaning on Christ. But how do we put this knowledge into action?

Through much prayer and counsel from my circle of friends, I have developed three steps that have helped me in my moments of anger. Step one is to isolate yourself from the situation. This may be either an emotional isolation where you put aside your feelings until there is an appropriate time to address them or a physical isolation where you remove yourself from the person who has provoked you. Step two is to pray; in your prayers tell God how you feel and ask to be shown what to do or say. Step three is to reflect. Writing allows me to get a better understanding of the situation I am in and helps me find a clear solution. You may prefer to communicate with a person you trust or sit alone with your thoughts. Whatever your method is, it is important that we take time to think and reflect and allow God to speak. I pray these steps guide and encourage you as they have assisted me. May you be patient with yourself as you begin this journey and cling to God at all times.

REACT

How can you ensure that you are managing your anger rather than allowing anger to control you?

Stephanie French, Alberta, Canada

Phil. 2:3;
Heb. 12:14

How-to *Who Is Your Master?*

Recently I learned that anyone who can control my response in any situation is my master and now holds the place of God in my life. How so? you might ask. It is because I have surrendered myself to their leadership, and they can now use me like a puppet on a string. They can trigger me to lose control of myself and ride the waves of my emotion. Shocking, isn't it? Yet it makes sense; if someone knows how to make you sad, happy, excited, or angry, that person can play with your emotions and master you.

It is no wonder Paul says that he brings his body under subjection, lest he preach to others yet become a castaway himself (1 Cor. 9:27). Daily, as we traverse life's path, we face times of trouble or conflict in our marriages, friendships, and work relationships. How do we make it practical so that we don't yield ourselves to the wrong master?

If someone knows how to make you sad, happy, excited, or angry, that person can play with your emotions and master you.

Understand what your triggers are. We are all prone to losing our tempers or saying the wrong thing. Why? Because we have triggers that have been imprinted in our neural pathways that instantly tell our brains how to respond. Being self-aware is the first step in overcoming being mastered by the wrong master.

Read God's counsel on how you should respond. Once we know how we should respond, then we will know the growth we will have to go through.

Use the tools that help you to memorize a lesson. In school I used Post-it Notes, flash cards, or apps to remind me of important principles, formulas, and so on to ace my exams. We can use similar reminders daily to reinforce the behavior changes we would like to achieve. Remember: repetition deepens impression.

Pray for the Holy Spirit's help. We cannot overcome without God's help; the Holy Spirit is our guide here on earth (John 14:26).

REACT

1. How does being challenged by God to live peaceably with everyone motivate you to manage your actions?
2. We are counseled to esteem others above ourselves; how can we use this principle in our conflict resolution?

Opinion
*Conflict—Adversity
or Asset*

Prov. 19:11;
Eph. 4:26, 27;
Phil. 2:4–8;
Col. 3:19

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). So our actions are matters of the heart. When a conflict arises, we can look at it as both an adversity and an asset. It just depends on how we use it as a tool in our lives.

**Often, in marriage, we have bitterness in our hearts
toward our spouses.**

If we view conflict as an opportunity, it is a chance to propel us forward. The desires of our heart, backed by faith, will produce the result. It will take resolve and determination to change adversity into an asset. We just need the right desire in our hearts.

Often, in marriage, we have bitterness in our hearts toward our spouses. We get angry for various reasons, yet we are counseled by God not to sin, not to let the sun go down on our wrath, and not to give the devil a foothold (Eph. 4:26, 27). This is easy to say but hard for a lot of us to put into practice because we get lost in our emotions, and then we sin. Yet there is hope!

“The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger. It is his glory to overlook an offense” (Prov. 19:11, WEB). To turn a conflict into an asset, one needs to understand the situation by taking time to ask questions. This will allow you to see things from your spouse’s perspective. If the situation is something that you will be too angry about, it is good to have a godly accountability partner with whom you can talk things through and pray. Take the time to analyze your feelings, and try to communicate clearly to your spouse what made you feel hurt. Talk about your feelings openly, find a resolution, take the time to heal, and continue building together.

REACT

1. How important is it to have the mind of Christ in us to overcome conflict?
2. As husbands, how are we called to love our wives and not be bitter against them?

Rom. 15:5

Exploration *One Mind*

CONCLUDE

As we look at the verses that we have studied this week, it is clear that God considered our humanity and understood that anger and conflict would be a part of it. Though conflict will come, He wants us to use conflict as a catalyst to build character. Though we are all unique, we can be united in overcoming conflict and have oneness in the purpose of treating each other kindly.

CONSIDER

- Interviewing a couple that has been happily married for more than 20 years to find out how they deal with conflict and keep their marriage growing.
- Writing out your feelings if you get into a conflict or get angry this week. Take the time to understand why you feel the way you do.
- Journaling three Bible texts that you can memorize to help you not get lost in your emotions when conflict arises.
- Listening to a song that encourages you when you are feeling down.
- Praying and asking God to show you areas in your heart that are areas for growth.
- Extending a kind gesture to someone you have had a conflict with recently to show that resolution can be made even after mistakes are made.

CONNECT

Matthew 22:37; Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:2.

Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*.

Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage* (Zondervan, 2015); *The Sacred Search* (David C. Cook, 2013).