

Powerful Prayers to Redeem Conflict in Your Home

When our youngest son was around 4 years old, he told me he didn't want to go out to breakfast with his grandma and me anymore. When I asked why, he said it was because the two of us always fight when we go out to eat. I was baffled by this explanation, since I always made it my goal to try to avoid conflict with my mother. When I asked him to explain, he told me that we always argue just before leaving the restaurant. I realized that he was referring to us each adamantly trying to pay the check!

I don't mind those kinds of conflicts. It's the real ones that have taken me so long to learn how to see through the love and light of Christ.

A former student of mine wanted to get together to catch up, but I was not able to find a convenient time toward the end of the school year. Then I had a significant deadline to meet the following month, so I had to again delay a meeting with her. Soon I received a follow-up email from her, telling me how disappointed she was in me because I could not find a time to meet. I remember sitting in a frozen-like state as details of her disappointment unfolded before my eyes. My initial shock turned quickly to a mixture of defensiveness and guilt. But I prayed for the Holy Spirit to guide my reactions and response, and then listened for a solution that was much more redemptive than simply trying to justify myself.

As much as we may desperately desire to live conflict-free, that's not possible this side of heaven. Conflict can make us emotionally and physically sick. It can ruin individual lives, families, communities and even nations.

In all the plentiful, respected research out there on conflict

management, one crucial piece of guidance is lacking: What do we do when intense emotions come into play during our conflict? All the advice on handling conflict can look good on paper, but what do we do when we are deeply hurt or angry? What do we do when we cannot even begin to see how we could feel differently about the situation and the person or persons involved?

I am thankful for what we can learn from the Bible regarding how to not only manage conflict, but also redeem conflict for the glory and kingdom of God.

What the Bible Teaches About Conflict

The Bible gives followers of Christ many guidelines for relating to each other. Jesus calls us to be models to the rest of the world of what it looks like to love one another. That's especially important when it comes to how we deal with conflict. Jesus prayed, "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23, NIV).

To that end, there are more than 30 "one another" Scripture verses that specifically show us how to live in harmony. Here are a few:

- "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted ..." (Eph. 4:32a, MEV).
- "Don't grumble against one another" (James 5:9a).
- "If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18).
- "Bear with one another and forgive one another. If anyone has a quarrel against anyone, even as Christ forgave you, so you must do" (Col. 3:13).

As followers of Christ, our calling in conflict is to redeem the conflict and preserve the relationship "as much as it depends on us." To redeem means to make something that has gone wrong right again. So the question becomes, In this

particular conflict, what role can I play in “making things right” in the most God-honoring way? Ephesians 4:15a gives us the starting point: “Speaking the truth in love ...”

That verse does not give license to speak truth whenever we want. Quite the contrary. We aren’t to speak the truth unless we can speak it in love.

Scripture also gives us many examples of what love looks like. If we convert some of them to questions, they look like this:

- Am I being patient and kind? (1 Cor. 13:4)
- Am I regarding another as better than myself? (Phil. 2:3)
- Am I caring about not only my interests, but also the interests of the other person? (Phil. 2:4)
- Am I being quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry? (James 1:19)

Or we could ask them a different way, based on 1 Corinthians 13:4–5:

- Am I dishonoring someone in the way I’m handling the conflict?
- Am I seeking my own interests?
- Am I jealous? Am I keeping a record of wrongs?

If I am responding more in line with the second list of questions, then I need to wait before I speak because I won’t be speaking out of love. Or maybe I am not to speak at all. When the Apostle Paul learned that some conflicts within the Corinthian church were leading to lawsuits, he said the lawsuits indicated the believers had already been defeated. Then came a question they likely didn’t expect: “Why not rather be wronged?” (1 Cor. 6:7b).

Why not rather be wronged? Really? Is it possible there are times I am not supposed to defend myself? And if I choose not to defend, is it possible not to build up resentment in the

process? Yes! The good news is that it is possible. But not on our own. And that is actually good news, too.

Redeeming Conflict Is Possible

One day, a rich young man came to Jesus and asked what he might do to be saved. After the man told Jesus he had followed the Ten Commandments since he was a child, Jesus told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor. The man walked away sad because he was very rich. Jesus then told His disciples that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. Very troubled, they asked, “Who then can be saved?” (see Mark 10:17-27).

Jesus responded, “With men it is impossible, but not with God. For with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).

The young man had walked away too soon. He walked away before entrusting his will and spirit to the Holy Spirit to do what was impossible without the Spirit. We need to believe the good news that with God all things are possible—even redeeming the most difficult of conflicts. If you are in the midst of a conflict that seems impossible to handle, don’t walk away too soon, like the rich young ruler did. Instead, keep asking the Holy Spirit—or perhaps you need to keep pleading with the Spirit—to give you the strength and power to handle the conflict in the most redemptive way.

Strength will come if you keep asking. So will freedom that you never imagined possible. That is the power of prayer in redeeming conflict.

When conflict arises, we can often miss the obvious—to pray. We can run ahead and forget that we have the power of the Spirit in us to make a difference in both how we feel about the conflict and how we handle it. We forget that the best thing we can do with a potentially divisive situation is take it to God in prayer.

Prayer Practices for Redeeming Conflict

There are several specific ways we can pray before, during, and after conflict that can help us to redeem conflict. Here are some that can be particularly powerful:

- Pray breath prayers. A breath prayer is simple, but when emotions flare in conflict, we need to remind ourselves to pray this way. Take a long, deep breath and ask the Holy Spirit to help you to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger” (James 1:19). If you feel led to speak, then take another deep breath and pray for the Spirit to show you a way to say what you want to say that will lead to more harmony than division.
- Pray for God’s will. If you ever wonder how to pray about anything, including conflict, the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13) is a great place to start. Note specifically the way Jesus taught His disciples to pray “Your will be done.” That is a crucial prayer during conflict. If you’re not yet willing to pray that prayer—if you want your will, not God’s—then ask the Holy Spirit for help in making what may seem impossible possible. Ask the Spirit to empower you with the transforming love of God. Only God’s love can melt and mold our hearts to want what God wants, helping us find the true desires of our hearts.
- Pray for the other person by name. Another great step toward redeeming conflict is to pray for those we are in conflict with—by name. We ask the Holy Spirit to work in both of our hearts for the outcome that pleases God, not us. If we cannot pray for people we are in conflict with by name, then that is a good sign we may have some serious heart work to do. We may need to first pray for the Spirit to make us willing to pray for the person—or even make us willing to be willing.
- Pray for forgiveness. Also in the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus demonstrates to His followers that we need to pray for

forgiveness of sins in the same way we have forgiven those who sinned against us (Matt. 6:12). That means our sins are forgiven when we forgive others, and our sins are not forgiven if we do not forgive others. It is hard to forgive when we harbor resentment and anger toward others. But forgiveness is necessary, not only to free the other person, but to free ourselves too.

- Pray in stillness. If you feel you cannot yet pray any of these prayers, then instead sit in silence with God. Be still. Wait on God. Let God's love wash over you and heal your soul. This is prayer too—silent communion, resting in the presence of the One who loves you most. Waiting in stillness before God is a powerful way to begin to redeem conflict.

Isaiah 40:31 tells us that those who “wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.” So be still and allow God's Spirit to renew your strength and give you all you need in order to do what may seem impossible.

On our own, it is impossible to handle conflict the way God desires us to. Committing to prayers like these can help us realize and remember that the power to redeem conflict comes from God's Spirit, not ours. How we respond becomes more important than the actual conflict. And when we yield to God's Spirit, He can free us to see and respond to conflict in ways we never believed possible.

If we can show the world what it looks like to approach conflict in redemptive ways, we will also hasten the day that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:5-6). {eo}

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