

**Sermon Series:** Pressure Points  
**To be used with:** Session Five, The Pressure of Conflict  
**Sermon Title Possibilities:**  
 Jesus' Plan for Resolving Conflict  
 Christians in Conflict  
**Scripture:** Matthew 5:23-25; Matthew 18:15-17

**Connection to Unit Theme:** While small groups are studying Pressure Points from the book of James, this sermon series is examining pressure points in the life of Jesus. As a human being, Jesus faced every pressure we face, and on a much deeper level. And since Jesus is the only perfect human being that has ever existed, we know that He never once caved in to pressure in any of the areas we are studying. How interesting that James was Jesus' half-brother, which means He had a front-row seat to how Jesus dealt with pressure.

### **Introduction:**

The United States has more lawyers per capita than any other country in the world. In 2005, there were 799,960 licensed lawyers in the United States— one for every 320 people. Obviously, all these lawyers need to have something to do. And as a result, the United States also leads the world in lawsuits. We've all heard the story of Stella Liebeck, who sued McDonald's in 1992 after spilling coffee into her own lap. Stella was awarded \$2.9 million in damages by a New Mexico jury, and ever since then, McDonald's has had to warn people that their coffee is hot. [if you want to add in more examples of frivolous lawsuits, check out <http://www.stellaawards.com/>]

This is not to bash lawyers. But we have to ask the question, is there a better way to resolve conflict than to drag someone to court? For those of us that follow Christ, how do we respond to our brothers and sisters in Christ when we are wronged?

In our small group study of the book of James, we've seen that the source of fighting and wars *among* us is the cravings that are at war *within* us (James 4:1). I hope you are involved in a small group, because you really need to understand how to deal with the internal causes of the external symptoms. But in today's message, we are going to focus on the external symptoms. What do we learn from Jesus about how to resolve conflict, particularly between believers? We're going to look at two passages of Jesus' teachings. I want to read both of them, and then we're going to make some observations about conflict resolution based on both passages. So please look up Matthew 5:23-25. Then, hold your thumb there and turn to Matthew 18:15.

[Read these two passages, one after another]

Jesus' advice about conflict resolution in these passages can be boiled down to four simple principles that I am convinced would help resolve 99% of the conflicts you are experiencing with other people. They are so short and simple we can say them out loud. Ready? Repeat after me:

1. **Quickly**
2. **Face to Face**
3. **One on one**
4. **Get help**

**1. Do It Quickly (Matthew 5:23-25)** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned that a believer who harbored anger against a brother or sister was just as guilty in God's eyes as a murderer. Since that is how God sees your anger, how important is it to get rid of it quickly? And I know that is hard for a lot of people. When someone has wronged you, you have a right to be angry, don't you? There are those of us who have held on to anger and resentment for so long that we literally do not know who we would be or what we would talk about if we didn't have that hurt to define us.

I also realize that there are some of you with some very painful backgrounds. I don't want to minimize the pain you have experienced in abusive relationships. What Jesus calls for in this passage is not easy, and may require professional help to accomplish. But Jesus is clear. Conflict needs to be handled quickly. In verses 23-24, He even implies that settling conflict is even more important than worship— to the point that if you are in the middle of a worship service, and you remember that your brother has something against you, you need to leave the worship service, be reconciled to your brother, and then come back to worship. Could it be that God won't even accept our worship until we make things right with our brothers and sisters? That's what this passage seems to be saying, and passages such as 1 John 4:20 back it up: "If anyone says, 'I love God' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who hates his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."

So when you have an issue with another believer, deal with it quickly. How quick is quick? Ephesians 4:26 says not to let the sun go down on your anger.

## **2. Face to Face (Matthew 18:15)**

Notice we did not say "Facebook to Facebook" Face to face communication gets harder every day. Our society is moving further and further away from face to face communication. That used to be the only option. Then came the invention of handwriting, and you could write a letter to someone. After that came the telephone. Followed by email. Then texting. Now, if you are mad at someone, you can just Tweet about it, and the whole world knows. But this is not the way Jesus taught. There is value in face to face confrontation. It is very hard to communicate emotion in an email or a text, and so it's very easy to misunderstand someone else. And while firing off an angry email gives you a chance to vent or get something off your chest, it does nothing for the other person.

## **3. One on One (Matthew 18:15)**

Pay attention to the second part of Matthew 18:15: "just between the two of you." Now right away, I may have just identified a sin your small group or your accountability partner has been helping you commit for years. Raise your hands if you have ever talked *about* someone before you talked *to* someone. Come on. Let's have some mutual accountability here. We've all done it. And if we are really spiritual, we've made it into a prayer request: "I need you guys to pray for my relationship with Bob. He is being such a jerk..." No matter how we dress it up and spiritualize it, it is wrong to talk about someone before you talk to someone.

The one exception to this rule is when you talk to God about the conflict you are having. This is a necessary step. Pray about the conflict you are having before you address it with the other person. But go into prayer humbly. Ask God to show you where you are wrong. Ask for wisdom

to help you identify the parts of the conflict that you own, and work on those things before you talk to the person. I know of one marriage counselor who always applied what he called the “ten percent rule” when couples came to him for counseling. He would try to get each spouse to take responsibility for ten percent of a problem. Most reasonable people would be willing to own ten percent, right? So this counselor would tell each spouse to work on their ten percent before the next session. The logic was that the next time they met, the problem would be 20 percent solved.

*So in a nutshell, talk to God about the other person before you talk to the other person. Talk to the other person before you talk to others about the other person.*

I want to stop and address an obvious question related to these three principles before we get to the fourth one. But what if you can’t get to the other person before the sun goes down? What if the sun has gone down on your anger lots and lots of times since you first became angry? Or what if the person you are harboring anger against is dead? If it isn’t possible to resolve, or if you’ve been hanging on to anger for years, then do this: say to yourself, “I am cancelling the debt this person owes me.” This doesn’t mean that the other person really and truly did not do you wrong, or that you don’t deserve an apology. It is simply saying, “that apology I am owed? I am cancelling the debt. I am not longer obligating this person to an apology.”

**4. Get Help (Matthew 18:16-17):** Here, Jesus lays out a biblical system for escalation. What happens when you and the person you are in conflict with can’t resolve things? You take it to the church. First, to one or two trusted (and mutual) friends who can help you mediate your conflict. If there is still no resolution, then there are “next levels” you can go to. *[Pastors, does your church have a system in place for helping members of your congregation resolve conflict? If so, share it here.]*

**Conclusion:** I am convinced that there are conflicts in our congregation that could be resolved if we were just willing to take these steps. Let’s review them together: **Quickly. Face to Face. One on One. Get Help.** During our time of invitation, I’d like you to think through any relationships that have gone sideways in your life. Remember the priority Jesus put on resolution: it may be that resolving this conflict is even more important than coming back to worship next week. So I’m going to assume that if you aren’t here next week, it’s because you are off resolving a conflict. And if you can’t resolve it, get help!

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