

Philippians

Part 11

How to Resolve Tensions
in the Church

2025-10-12



See the supplemental "Peacemaker" document for insights that will help you lead these discussion questions.

TALKING POINTS WALKINGPOINTS

Leader's Guide

A publication of  the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

① **Note:** Refer to the "Slippery Slope" diagram of conflict responses (next page) to discuss these questions.

- Observe that the following **all** are "**Escape Responses**", yet with **decreasing** intensity:

Suicide (1 Samuel 31:4) ⇔ **Flight** (1 Samuel 19:9-10) ⇔ **Denial** (1 Samuel 2:22-25)

- Observe that the following **all** are "**Attack Responses**", yet with **decreasing** intensity:

Murder (Acts 7:54-58) ⇔ **Litigation** (Acts 24:1—26:32) ⇔ **Assault** (Acts 6:8-15)

- Observe and discuss the following "**Private Peacemaking Responses**":

Overlook the Offense (Proverbs 19:11) ⇔ **Reconciliation** (Matthew 5:23-24) ⇔ **Negotiation** (Philippians 2:4)

- Observe and discuss the following "**Assisted Peacemaking Responses**":

Mediation (Matthew 18:16) ⇔ **Arbitration** (1 Corinthians 6:4) ⇔ **Accountability** (Matthew 18:12 & 17)

- Tell about a time when you've seen an "**Escape Response**" damage a relationship.

Tell about a time when you've seen an "**Attack Response**" damage a relationship.

Tell about a time when you've seen a "**Peacemaking Response**" repair a relationship.

- Do you **naturally tend toward** escaping or attacking?

Tell about a time when you chose to use a peacemaking response (either immediately or later).

Who do you know personally with whom you should share the "Slippery Slope" of responses?

UNMET DESIRES AND THE SLIPPERY SLOPE OF CONFLICT

Harmful conflict is usually triggered by unmet desires. *"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it"* (James 4:1-2). Even good desires can evolve into controlling demands or idols that lead us to judge others and then avoid or punish them until we get what we want (see Luke 10:38-42). This progression often starts with minor differences, but before we know it we're sliding down a slippery slope of conflict that can drop off in two directions.

ESCAPE RESPONSES

People tend to use escape responses when they are more interested in avoiding unpleasant people or situations than in resolving differences.

DENIAL—One way to escape from a conflict is to pretend that a problem does not exist. Another way is to refuse to do what should be done to resolve a conflict properly. These responses bring only temporary relief and usually make matters worse (see 1 Sam. 2:22-25).

FLIGHT—Another way to escape from a conflict is to run away. This may take the form of pulling away from a relationship, quitting a job, filing for divorce, or changing churches. Flight may be legitimate in extreme circumstances (see 1 Sam. 19:9-10), but in most cases it only postpones a proper solution to a problem.

SUICIDE—When people lose all hope of resolving a conflict, they may seek to escape from the situation (or make a desperate cry for help) by attempting to take their own lives (see 1 Sam. 31:4). Suicide is never a right way to deal with conflict.

Adapted from *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* by Ken Sande.

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PEACEMAKING RESPONSES

Peacemakers are people who breathe grace. Inspired by the gospel, they draw continually on the goodness and power of Jesus Christ, and then breathe out his love, mercy, forgiveness, and wisdom to dissipate anger, improve understanding, promote justice, and model repentance and reconciliation.

PERSONAL PEACEMAKING

There are three biblical ways to resolve conflicts personally and privately, just between you and the other party.

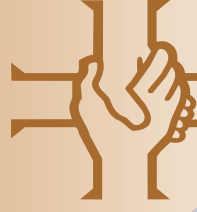
OVERLOOK AN OFFENSE—Many disputes are so insignificant that they should be resolved by quietly overlooking an offense. *"A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense"* (Prov. 19:11). Overlooking an offense is a form of forgiveness, and involves a deliberate decision not to talk about it, dwell on it, or let it grow into pent-up bitterness or anger.

RECONCILIATION—If an offense is too serious to overlook or has damaged our relationship, we need to resolve personal or relational issues through confession, loving correction, and forgiveness. *"If your brother has something against you... go and be reconciled"* (Matt. 5:23-24). *"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently"* (Gal. 6:1; see Matt. 18:15). *"Forgive as the Lord forgave you"* (Col. 3:13).

NEGOTIATION—Even if we successfully resolve relational issues, we may still need to work through material issues related to money, property, or other rights. This should be done through a cooperative bargaining process in which you and the other person seek to reach a settlement that satisfies the legitimate needs of each side. *"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others"* (Phil. 2:4).

PEACEMAKING RESPONSES
OVERLOOK RECONCILIATION NEGOTIATION MEDIATION ARBITRATION ACCOUNTABILITY ASSAULT LITIGATION MURDER

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE



ASSISTED PEACEMAKING

When a dispute cannot be resolved personally, God calls us to seek assistance from other believers.

MEDIATION—If two people cannot reach an agreement in private, they should ask one or more objective outside people to meet with them to help them communicate more effectively and explore possible solutions. *"If he will not listen [to you], take one or two others along"* (Matt. 18:16). The mediators may ask questions and give advice, but the parties retain the responsibility of making the final decision on how to resolve their differences.

ARBITRATION—When you and an opponent cannot come to a voluntary agreement on a material issue, you may appoint one or more arbitrators to listen to your arguments and render a binding decision to settle the issue. *"If you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church"* (1 Cor. 6:4).

ACCOUNTABILITY—If a person who professes to be a Christian wanders from the Lord by refusing to be reconciled and do what is right, Jesus commands church leaders to lovingly intervene to hold him or her accountable to Scripture and to promote repentance, justice, and forgiveness. *"If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not... go to look for the one that wandered off?... If he refuses to listen... tell it to the church"* (Matt. 18:12,17).

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ATTACK RESPONSES

People tend to use attack responses when they are more interested in controlling others and getting their way than in preserving a relationship.

ASSAULT—Some people try to overcome an opponent by using various forms of force or intimidation, such as verbal attacks (including gossip and slander), physical violence, or efforts to damage a person financially or professionally (see Acts 6:8-15). Such conduct always makes conflict worse.

LITIGATION—Although some conflicts may legitimately be taken before a civil judge (see Acts 24:1-26:32; Rom. 13:1-5), lawsuits usually damage relationships, diminish our Christian witness, and often fail to achieve complete justice. This is why Christians are commanded to make every effort to settle their differences within the church rather than in the civil courts (see 1 Cor. 6:1-8; Matt. 5:25-26).

MURDER—In extreme cases, people may be so desperate to win a dispute that they will try to kill those who oppose them (see Acts 7:54-58). While most people would not actually kill someone, we still stand guilty of murder in God's eyes when we harbor anger or contempt in our hearts toward others (see 1 John 3:15; Matt. 5:21-22).

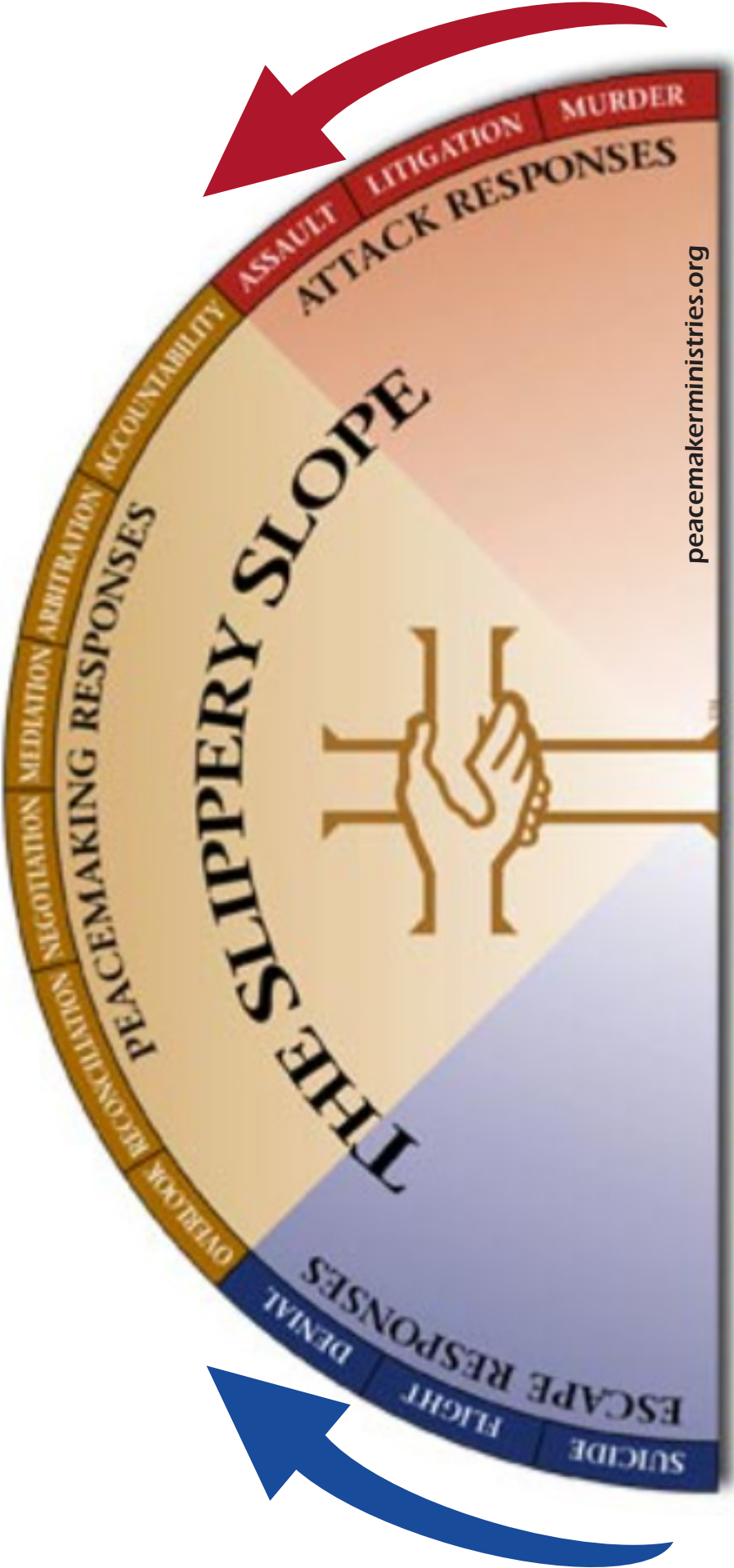
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THE GOSPEL—THE KEY TO PEACE

The key to changing the way we deal with conflict is the gospel, the good news that God made peace with us and between us by sending his Son to die for our sins and give us new life through his resurrection (Col. 1:19-20; Eph. 2:14-16). When we believe in Jesus, we receive forgiveness and are united with Christ and one another (Acts 10:43; Phil. 2:1-2). God then begins to transform us into the likeness of his Son, enabling us to break free from sinful escaping and attacking habits and mature into peacemakers who reflect the glory of God's reconciling love in the midst of conflict (2 Cor. 3:17-18; Col. 3:12-15).

This is the diagram that appears in the Talking Points, Walking Points.



Sermon Summary Text: Philippians 4:1-9

In today's passage, Paul addresses an issue in the Philippian church that was on his mind the whole time he was writing this letter. It involves an ongoing dispute between two women in the church at Philippi. Throughout the course of his letter, he has been laying down principles that, if applied, would help bring a godly resolution to this dispute.

As the elder reads the letter to the church, all of a sudden, this letter becomes very personal because Paul starts naming names (v. 1-2). Since Paul doesn't take a side in this dispute, I don't think it involved a doctrinal or moral problem for in his other letters Paul has demonstrated his willingness to tackle thorny issues involving church members (See 1 Corinthians 1:12; 5:1; 2 Corinthians 2:1-8; Galatians 1:6-10; 1 Timothy 1:3-4; Philemon). When you think about it, Paul hasn't really corrected anything here. Instead, he has called the Philippians to strive towards an ever-growing standard of righteous living. So, as we look back over Paul's letter, we discover three core themes: (1) like-mindedness, (2) humbly serving others, and (3) rejoicing in all circumstances.

If the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche didn't involve a doctrinal or moral issue, it must have been an interpersonal conflict of some kind. It probably wasn't an issue of moral right and wrong, but between what was perceived to be better vs best, between doing it one way, versus another way. Such matters are highly subjective, and what is perceived to be right is based on personal values and preferences. After feelings are hurt, what can be done to bring peace back into the church?

Paul found himself faced with just such a situation here in Philippi. As he comes to the end of his letter, he knows there's an "elephant in the church". The church doesn't have peace, because they're not sure how to handle the awkward tension between two of their members (vv.2-3). Paul writes to help them and us, because the truth is, this is a common life problem. Relational tilts like this one happen at home, at work, yes, even at church!

In v. 4-9, Paul reveals what to do so that the "peace of God" can return to the church. Paul says, "As the thought of Christ's return fills your mind, the issue between you won't seem to matter that much. As a result, you'll find yourself more gentle and more forbearing with each other." In the big scheme of things, and in light of Jesus' coming for us in glory, this dispute is insignificant and trivial. Instead of resenting each other, God will fill you with patience and forbearance. So, rejoice in the Lord, knowing that He could come anytime. Let that be your mindset!"

The second step is to turn this situation over God. Whatever importance you think it still has, talk to God about it. Tell Him what bothers you about it. Lay the issue out before Him. Ask Him for insight and perspective. In other words, don't fret and stew over it (v. 6). Lay the issue out before God. Ask God for wisdom and proper perspective. In v. 7, we see four important words here: "prayer", "supplication", "thanksgiving" and "requests". **Prayer:** "God, I don't want to be anxious about this. I come to you." **Supplication:** "I need your help." **Requests:** "Here are the specific issues to help me sort through this." **Thanksgiving:** "I'm grateful that you know things I don't know and that I can trust you to do good."

God's peace will protect your heart and guard your mind. That's how the peace of God comes to you. As the peace of God descends on individuals, they turn their attention to what is good and right and pure. The church is freed up to concentrate on what God has for us, the things that are excellent and worthy of praise (vv. 8-9). God wants us to experience His peace, His blessing, His love, His fellowship.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

***Conflict is unavoidable. Facing that fact opens the door to God using it redemptively.
But how?! Let's see....***

Monday— How does Ephesians 6:10-20 reveal conflict as a central theme of the biblical story?

Tuesday— How does James 1:2-4 reveal that conflict—which is a trial—is an opportunity for growth?

Wednesday— How does Romans 8:28-30 reveal the divine purpose behind conflict?

Thursday— Do mature believers ever encounter an impasse (Romans 12:17-18; Acts 16:36-41)?

Friday— What lies at the heart of conflict (James 4:1-10)?

Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]