

TEXT: **Matthew 18:15-17** "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. **16** But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. **17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

TITLE: **The Art of Resolving Conflict**

INTRO:

1. I will be preaching this week and next week about the subject of resolving conflict.
2. Before I go any further, I want to add a disclaimer. I am not going to be sharing these messages because I think there is a problem.
3. In fact, it is the very opposite. In the last few weeks, I have witnessed some very wonderful, Godly, and mature brothers in Christ do an absolutely amazing job at resolving conflict.
4. One in particular happened this week. A brother in our church called me and we chit chatted and then he very lovingly asked me a question.
5. He said pastor. Are we ok? Did I do something to offend you?
6. I responded that I thought we were great, and that the brother had not done anything to offend me.
7. We talked a little bit more about why he thought that. I apologized. He apologized, and in just a few minutes everything was restored.
8. In the conversation, however this brother made two very powerful observations.
9. He said, the enemy doesn't want us to get along. He plants these ideas in our minds. And I agreed.
10. But he also said, God has given us the tools to help us handle these types of things. And the first part of that is in going right to your brother and trying to work things out.
11. I am getting ahead of myself. But I just thought that was so great. He did a great job of resolving conflict. I see people all the time who are doing an amazing job of resolving conflict.
12. So again, this is not a couple of messages aimed at solving some problem. It is aimed at making sure we understand the tools God has given us to keep and maintain unity between us and others.
13. Because it is no secret to you that we are not immune from conflict. We all face conflict from time to time. There is the potential for conflict in our work

environment, in our families, in business or professional relationships, in a school setting and even in the church.

14. The truth is **conflict is a part of life that we all have to deal with**. I believe that all of us have to deal with conflict in life because if you are anything like me then conflict is closer than we care to admit.
15. Now maybe nobody else in this room today can identify with what I am about to say, but I have found in my life that I don't even have to have anybody else around me to have conflict.
16. I can send everybody out of the house, go into a room all by myself, lock the door in an attempt to escape all the conflict of the world and still find that conflict has somehow snuck its way into the room with me.
17. **Conflict is something that we all carry with us to varying degrees**. Let me give you an example. Have you ever gotten up in the morning and you knew there was something that you needed to do but you didn't feel like doing it or you were too tired, and you wrestled on the inside with whether to do it or put it off to another day? That's an internal conflict.
18. Have you ever gotten up in the morning and been faced with the fact that on your plate that day were some potentially stressful situations or decisions? The weight of those decisions or situations caused you to worry and become fearful. Maybe the weight of those situations made you angry or agitated and you began to view the whole day in a negative light all because of something that hasn't even happened yet. That's conflict.
19. Maybe you have been tempted to commit a particular sin. You know you shouldn't do it. You know you should avoid that tempting situation all together. But in a moment of weakness, you give in, you sin. And then you beat yourself up over what you knew all along was a bone headed mistake. That is conflict.
20. You will notice that this is not a message about avoiding conflict because the truth is **avoiding conflict is impossible**. Conflict goes with us wherever we are even if nobody else is around.
21. But we don't live in an isolated world, and so we carry around with us our own internal conflicts, but then we interact with other people who are straining under the weight of their own internal conflicts and before long all our internal conflicts are spilling over on to other people and in other circumstances.
22. Then we go to the job or to school or to that family reunion or even to church and we try to put aside all these internal conflicts but then someone

says something that we take the wrong way, or someone is impatient with us, or someone blames us or someone does something that we don't agree with and boom, we have conflict on top of conflict.

23. You see conflict is all around us to varying degrees. No matter who we are, where we live, when it happens or even why it happens, conflict is a part of the world we live in.
24. And so, in order to keep from wanting to destroy one another all the time, we just need to be reminded from time to time that God has given us a formula for resolving conflict.
25. In our text this morning, Jesus who is speaking to his disciples here in Matthew 18 knew that his followers would need the necessary tools in order to resolve natural conflict.
26. He says to them in **Matthew 18:15 If your brother sins against you.** In spite of the fact that Jesus uses the word if here it is pretty evident that it's not a matter of if but when conflict arises.
27. Jesus didn't attach a disclaimer to the beginning of this verse that said, well now you probably will never need to use what I am going to tell you next but in case you do here it is. He didn't do that. He makes the statement here as if to say when it happens, this is what you do.
28. The fact that Jesus addresses conflict also tells us something important about conflict resolution. While being exposed to conflict is something that is natural and normal, being good at conflict resolution is not something that is natural and normal.
29. The truth is **not all of us are good at resolving conflict.** I want to confess this morning that I have struggled for years with conflict resolution. I am still in the process of learning. I will not even try to tell you that I am good at it. But I can tell you that I am working at it, and every day I attempt to get better at it.
30. One time my wife and I attended a marriage seminar. One of the sessions was about resolving conflict in marriage. The instructors gave a 30-minute lesson on how to effectively resolve conflict in marriage and then our assignment as a couple was to discuss how well we are doing at resolving conflicts in our marriage.
31. My wife and I started our discussion by recounting horror stories of how we used to attempt to resolve conflict. The truth is in our early years we did more damage than good. Our attempts to resolve conflict usually created more conflict than resolution.

32. One of the reasons why we struggled so much is because I am an avoider, and she is a confronter. Early on when conflict arose my technique to deal with it was to avoid it, her technique to deal with it was to confront it.
33. And the truth is I saw her confrontation as offensive, and she saw my avoidance as offensive.
34. What we quickly learned is we didn't know how to resolve conflict. It does not come naturally to us and we just aren't very good at it.
35. Now I am not an authority on conflict resolution, but I have been around long enough and talked to enough people to know that we are not alone.
36. There are thousands upon thousands of people right here in Batesville Arkansas and maybe even hundreds of people here today who feel inadequate when it comes to dealing with conflict. To put it plainly, you just don't think you are good at dealing with conflict, and maybe you aren't. So as a result, there is the potential that the conflict in your life just continues to pile up and accumulate and never get resolved.
37. Sometimes that conflict piles up so deeply that it does damage to relationships and rather than get resolution you avoid.
38. We see this avoidance technique used an awful lot today. Rather than get resolution to a conflict people transfer out of a department or leave their job for another. Rather than resolve a conflict in a friendship they just quit being friends. Rather than resolve the conflict in a marriage they just quit being married, or they co-exist in the same house together for years with a separation and a distance that is so huge that they might as well be living on different planets.
39. Rather than resolve conflict, people quit church and go somewhere else.
40. Maybe you are not good at resolving conflict or it doesn't come naturally to you, but are you aware that doesn't let you off the hook? You and I are still responsible to do our best to develop the necessary skills to resolve conflict in our lives.
41. Jesus gave us here **the recipe to resolve conflict**. Now I am going to paraphrase for just a moment, and we will dig in to the meat of these verses later on but basically the recipe for conflict resolution goes like this.
 - a. **Talk to the person one on one**. If that doesn't work.
 - b. **Bring in an impartial third party**. If that doesn't work.
 - c. **Seek a higher authority**. Boss, teacher, counselor. If that doesn't work.
 - d. Then consider the relationship beyond repair.
42. But that is a last resort only after the other steps have failed.

43. Now the question I want to pose to you this morning is this. If Jesus has given us the recipe to resolve conflict, why isn't it used more? Why does so much conflict still go unresolved?

44. I want to share with you today some reasons why I believe there is so much unresolved conflict in our lives.

Fear of failure.

1. The problem is that many times for whatever reason we are afraid or feel like we will fail if we follow through with the proper steps of conflict resolution and so we just don't try.
2. Over the years I have had dozens of people come to me and share a conflict they were having with another person. Now I don't enjoy being a mediator, but I understand that it is sometimes necessary.
3. After listening to them describe their conflict the first question I always ask is have you followed the steps outlined in Matthew 18? Have you gone to them and talked to them about this?
4. I would venture to say more times than not the answer is no. No, I have not followed the steps in Matthew 18. My next question is always. Why not? Why have you not followed God's plan for resolving conflict?
5. Usually, the next response is I just don't do well with conflict. I'm just not good at it. I may just sit there and cry, I may not know what to say, I may get angry and say something I will regret, I just don't do well.
6. Now as I have said earlier, I don't doubt that there are people like me who aren't good at conflict resolution, but have you ever stopped to think that **you do lots of things well today that you didn't do well the first time you attempted them.**
7. How many people here did well the first time you tried to walk? The first time you tried to walk you fell down. You bumped your head. You busted your mouth. You got bruises and bumps and bloody lips. You probably looked like you had been beaten.
8. Guess what? Even though you weren't good at it you kept trying till you became good at it and now you walk naturally.
9. I've got news for you. The first time you tried to feed yourself you weren't good at it.

10. The first time you tried to ride a bike you were terrible. You skinned your knees, ran into a tree, fell down a lot and went crying to mommy more times than you care to admit, but you kept getting up on that bike until you could ride.
11. Maybe you have failed at conflict resolution. Maybe you are not very good at it. Maybe it doesn't come naturally to you. Don't quit. Don't give up. Get better. Practice. Keep working at it. I promise you will get better at resolving conflict.
12. Don't let fear of failure keep you from taking all the proper steps to get the resolution you desire.
13. Instead, let the fear of losing or damaging that relationship you hold so dear motivate you to keep trying and be vulnerable while you learn.
14. Another reason why conflict sometimes goes unresolved is because...

Some people just enjoy conflict.

15. Probably one of the most colorful descriptions of a person in the bible is found in the Old Testament book of Genesis chapter 16. Ishmael was the unborn child of Abraham.
16. In describing what kind of person Ishmael would be to his mother the angel of the Lord had this to say in **Genesis 16:12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."**
17. Basically, the life of Ishmael was shrouded in conflict from the moment he was born. Ishmael was comfortable constantly being in the middle of conflict.
18. It is vital that we understand that even in our best attempts to live at peace with the people around us it is inevitable that we are going to run into someone who just doesn't want to seek resolution to conflict.
19. I am going to take it a step further. We are going to encounter people who not only don't want resolution to conflict they kind of enjoy conflict. They kind of like conflict. Conflict is more natural to them than peace and resolution.
20. I knew a man years and years ago who was notorious for constantly stirring up conflict between people. Now he didn't like to be in the middle of conflict but he liked those around him to constantly be in conflict.

21. He was famous for walking up to a group of people, at church mind you, making a controversial statement and then stepping back while the group argued out their positions.
22. I didn't find him to be a mean person, but it was just amusing to him to see people in conflict. It was a source of entertainment for him.
23. When I make the statement that some people enjoy conflict, I don't mean that everybody is sinister or evil.
24. **Some people grew up with constant conflict surrounding their lives and they only know how to function in an environment where there is conflict.** Conflict is such a normal way of living for them that it scares them to think of living in a world where there is no conflict. It would be foreign to them for there not to be constant conflict.
25. **Some people create conflict because they are hurting.** Hurting people have the tendency to hurt others.
26. I talked to you earlier about some of the inner conflicts that we all carry inside of us. I only gave you a few examples but there could be hundreds more.
27. Some people are so weighed down by their own internal conflict that it spills over into all the other relationships they have.
28. Their internal conflict is so consuming that they have conflict on the job, with their extended and close family, in their friendships even with perfect strangers while they are out shopping.
29. The outer conflict they display is simply a glimpse into the inner conflict they struggle with.
30. Now for some people this inner conflict spills over to the outside unintentionally. In other words, it is not on purpose. The person doesn't intend to create conflict for those around them it just kind of happens.
31. For others the constant conflict that surrounds their life is intentional. Now that may not make sense. Why would someone intentionally create conflict?
32. Maybe to cover up their struggles with inner conflict. If they can create conflict for others, then it hides their own struggle. Maybe others create conflict as a way to keep people at arm's length because they fear if people got too close to them they might see they don't have everything together on the inside.

33. I don't claim to be a psychologist and I don't claim to have all the answers, but I do know that some folks just enjoy conflict, and as a result conflict follows them almost wherever they go.
34. The final reason I want to share with you today as to why there is so much unresolved conflict.

Following God's plan for conflict resolution leads to the truth and the truth can be scary.

35. Let me read to you again God's plan for resolving conflict. **Matthew 18:15-17** "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. **16** But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' **17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.
36. The first part of verse 15 says if your brother sins against you. That word sin in this case is actually translated hurts or injures. If your brother hurts or injures you by doing or saying something.
37. I am going to ask a stupid question but has anyone here ever been hurt by another person. If you say you have never been hurt by another person, then you are probably not human. We have all been hurt at some point.
38. The reason why what the other person did to you hurt, is because you thought you were closer to them than that. In other words, you cared.
39. So, in order to bring resolution to the conflict and restore the relationship Jesus tells us we are to go to the person and show them what they have done to hurt us. But here is where the problem comes in. In going to them and showing them what they did, we make ourselves vulnerable to that person showing us something we did wrong.
40. My wife and I hadn't been married for just a couple of weeks and she did something to hurt me, or so I thought she did.
41. Remember I am the avoider, so I didn't say anything. But I let the conflict build up inside of me. The more I thought about it the more hurt I was. I began to build a case against her much like an attorney would as to why she was guilty of hurting me.
42. I began to reason I had been so good to her, and I had treated her so well, how could she do such a terrible thing and hurt me the way she did. Well, I didn't say anything to her but it didn't take long for her to realize

that something was wrong, so after she finally had to drag it out of me I professionally made my case and convicted her right there on the spot. In my mind she was guilty.

43. I got done and just stood there to see her pitiful response. And here is what she said. Well first of all I didn't mean to hurt you. And second of all, you did almost the exact same thing to me last week and I didn't get upset at you.
44. Bam. She had used the worst possible weapon against me. The truth. The truth was I had been just as responsible if not more responsible for the conflict than she had been. And talking about the conflict had brought that to light.
45. **When we follow God's plan for conflict resolution it often times reveals the not so pretty truth about us**, and the truth about us is sometimes scary. The truth is we often times add to the conflict or have at least had a part. And it hurts to come to that realization.
46. For that reason, many people are scared of resolving conflict God's way. But what we fail to see is that God's plan for resolving conflict is not meant to threaten us or beat us over the head, it is meant to bring restoration and healing and health to that relationship that we care about so much.

Conclusion:

1. **So often we are scared of and avoid the very process that has the power to set us free and bring us life and peace.**
2. God's plan for conflict resolution brings life, and no conflict is more in need of resolution than the one between the sinfulness of our heart and the goodness of God.
3. In talking about our internal conflicts earlier the one I didn't mention is the conflict that occurs when we have sin in our heart, and we are separated from God and his love.
4. Many people in our world today live in constant conflict with God. They are afraid to get close to God or close to his church because in getting close it might reveal that something has to change about my life.
5. **You don't have to be afraid of God.** If you are here today and you are plagued by the conflict of sin in your life, you need to know that Jesus would love nothing more than to help you resolve that conflict by forgiving you and giving you new life in him.

6. The step to resolving that conflict is the same as has been described in Matthew 18. Just talk to Jesus. I want to help you talk to him. Pray with me.
7. Maybe you are here today and you need God's help in developing the art of conflict resolution.
 - a. Maybe you are afraid of failure. You don't think you are good at it.
 - b. Maybe your life has been so filled with conflict that you don't know any other way to live.
 - c. Maybe you are afraid of being honest with yourself.
8. You can be better at resolving conflict.
9. Would you join me right now in asking the Holy Spirit to help us take responsibility for resolving conflict.
10. Confess to God that resolving conflict God's way is not a suggestion, it is a command.
11. What is it that keeps you from being better at resolving conflict.
12. Confess it to the Lord right now. Ask the Holy Spirit for help in seeing a change in your life.
13. One of the things that helps us see the need for resolving conflict is when we realize we need one another.
14. Relationships with others are not optional, they are vital to growing in our faith.
15. Ask God to help us place higher value on loving people, than we do on our fears, or being right, or whatever keeps us from resolving conflict God's way.