ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF UNRECONCILED CONFLICT

ON CHURCH HEALTH AT CONSOLIDATED BAPTIST

CHURCH IN LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

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A Project

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by

Priscilla McCowan

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APPROVAL SHEET

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To my family, thank you for your undying love and support.

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PREFACE

I have so much, and so many people, to be thankful for. To each person who has poured into my life, thank you. No matter how small or large, you were a participant in this process. People have been so kind through this journey, and I am grateful.

To my parents, whose love emulates God's love for his children. I could not have been more blessed having you as parents. Thank you for your unconditional love and support. Thank you for patience and allowing me to pursue my dreams with your blessing. To my sisters, Carla and Mavis, I could not have accomplished this goal without you. Thank you for reading, editing, and suggesting improvements as you read each word of this document over and over. Thank you for your help and encouragement, and for loving me unconditionally.

Thank you to my supportive friends for your words of encouragement and for being cheerleaders. Thank you for being there for me and my family. Thank you, Pastor Richard Gaines, for your support, and for trusting me to teach a sensitive subject to your leaders. I have learned a lot from you about grace and compassion, which only enhanced my work. Thank you, God's Stop Sunday school class, for showing me what real community is like. Your prayers for me will forever stay in my heart. And thank you to each CBC leader who participated in my class. Together, we can make a difference in how conflict is resolved in our church.

I thank God for blessing me with my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Joseph Harrod. I am indebted to you for your patience and helpful guidance. Thank you for all you have done for me. Thank you, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, for allowing me an opportunity to pursue a dream I thought would never be realized. A special thanks to my

editor, Betsy Fredrick. This would not have been possible without your editing superpowers.

I would be remiss if I did not thank two people who recognized my spiritual gifts before I could see them in myself. To my late Uncle Lindsey, I have no idea how you could see my teaching gift at least a decade before I did but thank you for frequently speaking that truth into my life. Your comments were confusing at the time, but now I understand. To my late pastor Rev. Richard Hill, thank you. You were my spiritual mentor and coach, an encourager, teacher, and friend. Thank you for recognizing my spiritual gifts and giving me opportunities to use them. Thank you for modelling the importance of studying to rightly divide God's Word. You prepared me well for seminary.

No one achieves alone. God has blessed me more than I could ever hope, or dream. Thank you, Lord, for your lovingkindness, grace, and compassion to me. Thank you for sending all the people I have thanked into my life. Thank you for showing me my purpose in ministry. You alone get the glory for this finished work. I pray your will be done in my life and ministry.

<div align="right">Priscilla McCowan</div>

Danville, Kentucky

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inescapable reality of life. Because Christians have varying levels
of spiritual maturity, conflict is also inescapable in the life of most churches. Response to
a conflict situation at church, or anywhere, is a clear reflection of a Christian's level of
spiritual maturity. This project shows the necessity of one's intentional efforts to become
spiritually mature if one desires a leadership position in the church. A church and its
leaders must demonstrate a desire to (1) develop self-control of one's speech and
behavior when responding to conflict situations; (2) select leaders and potential leaders
who are making intentional efforts to grow spiritually and control their speech; (3) train
leaders to effectively manage and resolve conflicts in a church setting;[1] and (4) evaluate
the contribution such training makes to a healthy church environment.

Context

The Consolidated Baptist Church (CBC), in Lexington, Kentucky, is diverse in
several ways. Most CBC members became members within the last twenty years and
came from mostly Protestant and Catholic denominational backgrounds. Ideological
differences exist, despite discipleship classes that teach only Baptist doctrine. The current
pastor has been at CBC for approximately twenty-five years, and in that time, the church
membership grew from 275 to 1,600 members. When he arrived, the church was in conflict
due to undisclosed issues. The impact of the conflict was severe enough that the pastor
spent the first few years of his tenure healing congregational mistrust and dissension.

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[1] Resolving conflict must include a reconciliation component to restore unity among believers.
Numerous scripture passages require Christians to be reconciled to each other. Examples include, but are
not limited to, Matt 6:14-15; 1 Cor 12:12-31; 13:1-13; Eph 4; 5:6; 15-21; Jas 4:1-12.

During the largest period of growth, from 2003-2012, Sunday morning worship attendance reached 2,000. From that time until 2019, CBC had three Sunday morning services, each with their own personality. The 8:00 a.m. service attracted members whom a former assistant pastor referred to as the "tried and faithful . . . the serious worshippers." People under the age of forty rarely attend this service. The 9:30 a.m. service was predominantly attended by working professionals and families. The 11:00 a.m. was a mix of all age groups, including young adults, single adults, older members who held to the traditional 11:00 a.m. starting time for church, and families with younger children. In 2019, senior leadership decided to change to two services. The 9:30 a.m. service was eliminated for a couple of reasons. First, attendance dropped to approximately 800 in Sunday worship so there was no reason to have three services; the sanctuary holds approximately 900 persons. Second, and most important, discipleship class (Sunday School) attendance was waning and if the 9:30 a.m. service was deleted, more people could attend a discipleship class, which is from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. The initial decision received mixed reactions from members, but they have adjusted. The 11:00 a.m. service appears to have increased attendance, but there has been no significant change in attendance for the 8:00 a.m. service.[2] During the pandemic, CBC went to virtual services at 8:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. Although the church has re-opened to in person service, the virtual service continues. The virtual service has stable attendance and includes existing members who chose not to return to the in-person service, and new members who are virtual only members.[3]

In 2003, the church relocated to another part of the city in hopes of encouraging greater interaction with diverse people groups, a goal that was somewhat achieved.

[2] Shortly after re-opening post-pandemic, the 8:00 a.m. service was suspended, leaving only one 11:00 a.m. service. When attendance significantly increases, the 8:00 a.m. service may resume.

[3] Virtual only membership is new for CBC and has created opportunities to expand our concept of community and offer new ministries in a virtual only format.

Unfortunately, by 2021, violent crimes in Lexington, Kentucky, dramatically increased, and members expressed concerns about safety and were hesitant to do evangelistic and mission work in the neighborhoods near the church. This perception was held by enough church members that getting people involved in mission related ministry outside the church has been challenging. CBC does, however, welcome the community and value aligned organizations to use the church. The facility is large, with a gymnasium, meeting space, and a sanctuary that seats approximately 900 people. The church extends the use of its space to the community whenever possible for activities that align with the mission of CBC. Examples include the Police Activities League, Drive-thru COVID-19 testing, COVID-19 vaccinations, after school reading programs, and other investments in the local community. The church also sponsors a Spanish-speaking church plant to minister to the city's Spanish-speaking community. While CBC hosts many worthwhile endeavors, the reluctance of members to go outside the church to do more impactful ministry is a challenge to the Great Commission mandate. Despite conflict in some areas, the church has many strengths that are worthy of note.

On the outside, CBC looks like one of the healthiest churches in Lexington, and it most likely is healthier than many churches in the area. It has healthy components internally, including, but not limited to, the worship experience, qualified Bible teachers, excellent preachers of the gospel, principled lay leaders, healthy finances, and higher than average member education levels. Perhaps the greatest strength of CBC is its pastor who is willing to take a critical look at the health of the church and take pro-active steps to address issues that could create decline in the future. There are external strengths too, including presence and collaboration in the community, physical location, and the pastor's stellar reputation as both a man of God and a community leader.

When CBC was at its best, two of its strengths were the energy put into helping its leaders be successful and its commitment to discipleship. Over time, these areas eroded. One of the reasons for this erosion was the church and its leaders failing to recognize

complacency. CBC rested on past successes and simply did not notice the gradual demise of what once was. The pastor acknowledges that the church is not as healthy as it once was and says unresolved conflict has been an issue. Successfully managing conflict, along with a good strategic plan, should address two key areas of leader weakness that may be rooted, in part, in unreconciled conflict. Once the key areas of leadership development and lack of member engagement improve, the church will become more spiritually mature and develop greater capacity to minister to the congregation and community.

Key Area 1: Leadership Development

Many CBC church leaders have been in leadership positions for several years (including teachers). While experience is valuable, some would relinquish their leader role if there were a pool of willing leaders available. As with many churches today, there are inadequate numbers of persons to assume leader positions. Current church leadership needs to consider what needs to happen to encourage potential leaders to develop and use their leadership skills at CBC.

The pastor said leadership development was a key factor driving the health of the church when it was the healthiest. To ensure healthy leadership for the future, the Leadership Institute, a training curriculum for leaders, was implemented in the early 2000s. Completion of the Leadership Institute was required for anyone in a leadership position or those seeking leadership positions. The curriculum was a strong mix of theological education, biblical leadership training, and church administration. Persons already in leadership positions when the program commenced were required to complete the Institute to continue serving as a leader of a ministry. From their experience in the Leadership Institute, leaders were empowered to lead effectively. The result was greater zeal and participation in ministry. The Director of the Leadership Institute, a dynamic leader, relocated to another city in 2008, causing a void in the leadership structure. Another detriment to the Leadership Institute occurred in 2008, when budget shortfalls could not

provide funding for a salary for that position. No one would volunteer to accept the responsibility for managing this large project and it ceased around 2012.[4]

Currently, there are numerous ministries at CBC. There are over sixty people serving in leadership positions, many of whom report directly to the pastor or Church Administrator. While some completed the Leadership Institute training, most have not. Some leaders have had no formal training in Christian leadership prior to assuming their position.[5] A lack of leader training reduces the overall effectiveness of CBC leaders, which causes some ministries at CBC to be less effective, making it difficult to fulfill the mission of the church. Practical leadership development that promotes spiritual maturity decreases leader ineffectiveness in key areas, including the ability to reconcile conflict events. [6]

Key Area 2: Lack of Member Engagement

Perhaps the true Achilles heel of CBC is lack of member engagement. Currently, fewer than three hundred members participate in active ministry. As with most churches, a few people serve in multiple ministries. Most of the congregation attend worship and go home. While some members became burnt out and resigned from ministries and leadership positions, most never got started. Several became disengaged because of unresolved conflict. To engage more members in active ministry service, CBC needs a strategy toward increased engagement and leader development.[7]

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[4] This statement is based on several conversations with Richard Gaines in which he says leadership development is the primary deficiency in CBC at this time.

[5] After 2008, it is unclear whether leaders were required to participate in training, and several people became leaders after the program ceased, which seems to be 2011 or 2012.

[6] There was no conflict resolution related course in the Leadership Institute.

[7] Conflict resolution is the only training addressed in this project.

Rationale

   This project focused on the importance of selecting maturing leaders and providing the tools and training needed to tackle conflict situations. A system to train leaders to reconcile conflict is necessary for the church for several reasons. First, effective conflict resolution training promotes unity in the church. Many Christians do not know how to effectively resolve conflict in a godly manner. Being unequipped to resolve conflict can lead to avoidance, which often makes conflict worse, or one or more parties responds in an ungodly manner, which affects Christian witness. Ephesians 4:1-7 calls for unity in the body of Christ. Paul says Christians should walk in humility, gentleness, patience, and love. These principles allow Christians to resolve conflict with grace, compassion, and a spirit of reconciliation to God and between the persons involved. These characteristics tend not to be present in a heated negative conflict, which is characterized by ego, selfishness, and poor speech choices. Negative conflict causes disunity among members. James 3:1–4:12 paints a picture of the impact these behaviors have on unity in the church. As a result, members often become disengaged in ministry. These negative experiences cause some people to leave ministry, while others choose not to participate because of their perceptions of negative conflict occurring in the church. When conflict events occur between two or more CBC members, news of that conflict can spread quickly throughout the church and community. People's perception of the church, clergy, and members may change in a way that negatively impacts attendance and future membership. The impact is particularly damaging when the conflict is between leaders, who are also leading others in the church. Negative conflict tends to polarize congregations, which increases the likelihood of more conflict events. James calls the church to repent and turn back to God. Poorly handled conflicts are indicative of sin's influence in the church.

   Second, churches need systems in place to develop and train Christian leaders. A good training program is essential to leader success. While some people may be natural leaders, leadership is a learned skill set most can acquire. Not only will such a program enhance competency in an area like conflict resolution, but it will also strengthen

communication, biblical knowledge, and confidence in the leader. Proper training will produce leaders who are biblically faithful and equipped with the tools needed to lead others in a church setting.

Finally, leaders need to be selected carefully. Poor handling of a negative conflict event demonstrates spiritual immaturity. When a leader consistently attempts to resolve conflict by becoming defensive, aggressive, or avoidant, such behavior shows a lack of adherence to Godly principles, and spiritual immaturity. At best, such a person demonstrates ignorance of God's Word, and at worst, a person demonstrates a disregard for God's Word, both of which would exclude an individual from a leadership position. It is in the best interest of the local church to have a strategy for selecting leaders that will exclude those who have not allowed the Holy Spirit to transform their hearts and minds. Only then will church leaders be able to consistently respond to conflict events with grace and love.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a framework to understand the impact of unresolved conflict at the Consolidated Baptist Church, Lexington, Kentucky.

Goals

The following goals reflect the necessary steps by which the purpose of this project was accomplished. The first goal was designed to prepare the leaders for conflict resolution training. The next goal involved developing the framework for developing leaders who can successfully resolve conflict while remaining biblically faithful. The third goal was to train leaders in conflict resolution and evaluate its effectiveness. The goals for this project were as follows:

1. Assess leader comfort level with their ability to reconcile conflict in a ministry context.

2. Develop a curriculum on biblical conflict resolution.

3. Modify leader comfort level with reconciling conflict in a ministry context.

Research Methodology

Three goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess leader comfort level with their ability to reconcile conflict in a ministry context. A pre-course survey was administered to class participants.[8] The goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the participants completed the pre-course survey.

The second goal was to develop a curriculum on biblical conflict resolution. The blended curriculum[9] included biblical teaching, problem solving, conflict resolution styles, conflict types, and conflict pericope analysis. The goal was measured using a rubric to assess biblical faithfulness, vision alignment, teaching methodology and ease of duplication.[10] The goal was considered successfully met when there was a 90 percent adherence rate to all components of the rubric.[11]

The third goal was to modify leader comfort level with reconciling conflict in a ministry context. The goal was measured by comparing pre-course survey and post-course survey scores using a t-test for dependent variables.[12] The goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Biblical faithfulness. Biblical faithfulness is adherence to the contextual meaning of Scriptures found in the Holy Bible when applied to conflict situations.

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[8] See appendix 1.

[9] The course was taught virtually, meeting once weekly via Zoom with outside reading assignments between classes.

[10] See appendix 2.

[11] The curriculum was assessed before the pilot, and after the pilot, if changes were necessary.

[12] See appendix 1.

Conflict. Conflict is a disagreement between two or more parties within a family, community or organization.[13] *Conflict* is a breakdown in communication that occurs when people care about an issue, disagree on an issue, or misunderstand each other about an issue.[14] *Conflict* can be verbal, written, ideological, or physical, and manifests itself internally, interpersonally, inter- and intra-group, or organizationally. The result of an unresolved conflict experience causes harm to the local church body.

Conflict resolution. Conflict resolution is the ability to end a disagreement between one or more parties in a biblically faithful manner that resolves an issue or a problem.

Conflict reconciliation. Conflict reconciliation is the ability to reconcile relationships between persons who have experienced conflict. Such reconciliation requires parties in the conflict to repent, if necessary, and seek right standing with those with whom they were in conflict, and with God.

Mediation. Mediation is the intervention by a neutral party into a conflict that the conflicting parties have been unable to resolve on their own.

Spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is the ability to live faithfully by the tenets of Scripture, exemplifying God's presence in one's speech and behavior.

Executive Leadership Team. The CBC Executive Leadership Team is comprised of the Senior Pastor, Church Administrator, Youth Pastor, Children's Pastor, Worship Pastor, Lead Deacon, and Lead Trustee. All other ministries fall under one of these senior leaders.

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[13] Doug Bixby, *Navigating the Nonsense: Church Conflict and Triangulation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 3. Several writers make a clear distinction between conflict and disagreement. For example, Phillips asserts that a conflict represents a lack of communication, while a disagreement indicates some level of continuing communication that will lead to a resolution. Bob Phillips, *Overcoming Conflict* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2017), 15. Gangel concurs that disagreements can happen without conflict arising. Kenneth O. Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry: Using Multiple Gifts to Build a Unified Vision* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 188.

[14] Phillips, *Overcoming Conflict*, 15.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre-course and post-course surveys were dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their knowledge and understanding of conflict in the local church. To mitigate this limitation, respondents were encouraged to provide honest answers with answers remaining as confidential as possible for a research study. Second, the effectiveness of the training was limited by the constancy of attendance. If participants did not attend all training sessions, then it would be difficult to measure how beneficial the training was. To mitigate this limitation, participants attended live virtual instruction once a week and were expected to complete weekly assignments. Live virtual sessions were recorded so students who missed the live session could fully participate in the weeks' course responsibilities.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project addressed church leadership but not leadership in other areas of participant lives. Second, the project was confined to a three-month timeframe. This timeframe gave adequate time to prepare and equip leaders to effectively lead their ministries. Finally, this project was limited to current leaders, but not potential leaders or new leaders who assumed positions after the project began.

Conclusion

Consolidated Baptist Church is not unlike many evangelical churches in the United States. Approximately 65 percent are either in decline or have plateaued.[15] Unresolved conflict may play a role in this decline. Addressing unresolved conflict offers an opportunity for leaders to grow spiritually and build a stronger, healthier church. Building stronger church unity within the local congregation, and among leaders, glorifies God.

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[15] Thom Rainer, "Dispelling the Eighty Percent Myth of Declining Churches," June 28, 2017, https://thomrainer.com/2017/06/dispelling-80-percent-myth-declining-churches/.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR
AVOIDING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT

Interpersonal conflict is a reality in every human relationship, even within the church. From Cain and Abel, and Moses's frequent conflicts with the children of Israel in Exodus in the Old Testament, to New Testament examples between Jesus and the religious leaders (Matt 21) and his own disciples (Mark 10), the Bible gives testimony to the existence of conflict, explaining both its root and its cure. Stephen Macchia writes, "Conflict is cancerous to relationships if left unattended. Resolving our conflicts begins with an honest assessment of our heart in line with scripture."[1]

Wisdom literature in the Old and New Testaments encourages Christians to develop spiritual maturity, giving particular attention to the heart and the tongue, to effectively address and even avoid negative conflict. An exegesis of two contrasting passages, Proverbs 2:1-15 and Proverbs 6:12-19, provides God's standard for spiritual maturity, as well as discourse on His hatred for morally deficient behaviors consistent with spiritual immaturity. These passages provide evidence that control of one's speech and behavior is a hallmark of Christian maturity and a qualification for Christian leadership.

In addition, building on God's standard of spiritual maturity and its impact on speech, the book of James gives significant attention to this subject with respect to Christian leaders. An exegesis of James 3:1-13 and James 4:1-12 compels leaders to speak wisely so they can address conflict with grace and humility.

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[1] Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 106.

<center>**Christians Must Seek Wisdom for Godly Speech**</center>

Christians who are intentional in their efforts to develop a mature Christ-emulating lifestyle share common characteristics. First, they seek Godly wisdom for daily living through diligent study of Scripture and prayer. Biblical wisdom literature provides practical guidance to develop spiritual maturity. Second, their speech and actions are tempered with love, compassion, and humility. This section will examine the benefits and blessings of pursuing spiritual maturity, with emphasis on speech. There is also discourse on the consequence of failing to pursue Godly wisdom.

The book of Proverbs, a collection of wise sayings, many of which are attributed to Solomon, provides guidance to help Christians become spiritually mature. In Proverbs 1:2-6, the author explains that the purpose of this book is to learn wisdom and personal discipline; to receive helpful instruction in righteousness, justice, and integrity; and to teach the spiritually immature so they might become spiritually mature. Proverbs 1–9 feature longer discourses on pursuing wisdom, written from the perspective of a father to a son. Proverbs 10–31 are collections of short proverbial sayings or poetry that use various literary techniques common in the Ancient Near East to characterize wisdom and folly.[2]

Christians Must Intentionally Seek
Wisdom to Control Speech
(Prov 2:1-15)

Proverbs 2 advises the young man in this passage to actively seek wisdom because of its benefits. He is advised to listen to his father's teaching (Prov 2:1-2), vigorously seek wisdom (Prov 2: 3-4), accept God's gift of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge (Prov 2:5-6). Michael Fox asserts that in doing so, the seeker will achieve

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[2] Proverbs were as common in Near Eastern and Egyptian writings as they were in Hebrew writing. Proverbs in general would have been widely understood by the targeted audiences of that time. Longman, in his book *How to Read Proverbs*, discusses this at length. He asserts that this type of writing style was common and at times the proverbial messages in scripture overlapped with other proverbs from other cultures that were written during that time. Tremper Longman III, *How To Read Proverbs* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 76.

piety. From piety, comes benefits, success, and protection (Prov 2:7-9, 12-15). The result will be a person whose heart is delightfully filled with wisdom and knowledge (Prov 2–11).[3] The ensuing behaviors will enhance one's ability to resolve conflict and life issues, consistently using a Godly attitude.

**The Call to Listen and Pursue
Wisdom (Prov 2:1–4)**

Proverbs 2:1-4 is a father's appeal for his son to hear, accept, and act on his appeals to pursue wisdom. This passage presents teaching and learning as moral practices. Daniel Estes says, "Foundational to all of the goals of education in Proverbs 1-9 is the personal commitment of the learner. The teacher does not just seek passive acceptance of the tradition that he transmits, but rather cultivates an active desire by the learner to appropriate wisdom for himself."[4]

Acquiring wisdom, which is based in a relationship with God and which produces spiritual maturity, requires one to be intentional and consistent, rather than passive, in its pursuit. In Proverbs 2:3-4, the father tells the son to seek wisdom from God with the same vigor as he would seek silver or search for hidden treasure because it is of great value to the morally upright. Roland Murphy notes that several passages in Proverbs, including this one, declare wisdom to be of greater value than precious stones.[5]

The Benefits of Wisdom (Prov 2:5-15)

The relationship between wisdom and Yahweh is clear. Tremper Longman describes the circular style of this passage: if one seeks God he finds wisdom, and if one

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[3] Michael V. Fox, "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 2 (1994): 235.

[4] Daniel J. Estes, *Hear My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 65.

[5] Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 15.

seeks wisdom he finds God. Wisdom is given to seekers as a gift and reward from God. Recognizing the imparted knowledge and understanding the seeker now possesses, and reaping the benefits thereof, humbles the seeker. Proverbs 2:7 declares that He blesses His people with success, which is defined as a cultivated, intimate relationship between God and those who earnestly seek Him. Longman quotes Fox, saying that success is "an inner power that helps one escape a fix."[6] The verse ends by declaring that God is a shield to protect and guard wisdom seekers, and as that shield, He gives success to those who live with integrity. Proverbs 2:8 reiterates God as the guard of the wise path.

When the seeker has diligently sought wisdom and has been gifted with God's shield of integrity, then Proverbs 2:9 says he will become spiritually mature in his understanding of righteousness, justice, and integrity. Estes notes the parallel between Proverbs 2:9 and Proverbs 1:3b. He says that "right" speaks of conformity with a standard and concludes, "The measure for behavior is not subjective personal desire, relative cultural norms, or the pragmatic test of what works, but rather how well it corresponds to Yahweh's righteous standard."[7]

Why is there such a clear understanding of righteousness, justice, and integrity in Proverbs 2:9? Bruce Waltke states the answer can be found in verse 10. Wisdom entered the heart of the seeker and not only have his proverbial eyes been open, but so has his heart been regenerated. Waltke also points out the parallel between verse 6 and verse 10 as wisdom travelled from the Lord's mouth to the father, then to the son, and finally, to the son's heart.[8] The relationship between God and the wise person is now solidified, intimate, and life changing.

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[6] Michael Fox, quoted in Tremper Longman, *Proverb*s (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 120-21.

[7] Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 51.

[8] Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1-15,* The International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 227.

The focus now shifts back to metaphors of guidance and protection in Proverbs 2:11-15. Fox makes an interesting observation about verse 11, saying that as discretion watches over the wise person, discernment allows him to make choices that honor God, regardless of peer influence. A wise person is not easily influenced by the sinful enticements that worldly unrighteous persons offer.[9] Such discernment rescues one from the damage of other's evil speech and actions (Prov 6:12-13) and from evil persons who celebrate wickedness toward others (Prov 6:14-15).

Foolish Behavior Is Not God's Choice

The Bible is filled with God's standard for Christian living. Careful study of God's Word will cause one to mature spiritually and better align with His standard. It is not enough to study what pleases God; one must also know what displeases God. Such behaviors are considered detestable by God. The Bible calls such behavior foolish and admonishes believers to avoid foolish behavior.

Christians Must Avoid Foolish Behavior (Prov 6:12-15)

Christians who are not intentional in efforts to become spiritually mature may exhibit behaviors God calls detestable, like reckless speech. Longman writes, "Proverbs teaches in a way that promotes social harmony; thus, anything that causes [negative] conflict is condemned."[10] Proverbs 6:12-19 identifies detestable behaviors that describe the behavior of the foolish person who does not seek wisdom. While Christians are to avoid these behaviors, spiritual maturity is a growth process. When Christians either fail to see or fail to acknowledge their spiritual immaturity, attempts to correct behaviors create greater conflict.

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[9] Fox, "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2," 240.

[10] Longman, *Proverbs*, 555.

In the discourse in Proverbs 6, the father warns the son not to engage in reckless, immature behaviors. The third stanza of chapter 6 (vv. 12-19) may have been two independent strophes originally; a description of the wicked person who displays malicious behavior and seven reprehensible behaviors God detests. Because the second strophe expands the first strophe, this passage should be considered one stanza, describing a person who displays behavior God detests.[11]

Proverbs 6:12-15 begins the description by calling this person wicked. Richard Clifford states, "The verses describe the wicked person, in his essence (v.12a), demeanor (vv. 12b-13), inner life (v. 14a), effect on society (v. 14b), and destiny (v. 15). The result is an intensified portrait of wickedness."[12] Waltke calls this person "morally inferior, a nefarious insurrectionist."[13] He further develops his description by aligning the insurrectionists' behavior with that of the devil, which identifies this type of person as malevolent and deliberate in their desire to incite conflict and disrupt divine order.[14]

Behaviors that incite conflict and disrupt divine order are elaborated upon in Proverbs 6:12b-14. The first, in verse 12b, is a crooked, perverse mouth (speech). From this mouth, one can expect lies, gossip, slander, and harmful words. Longman discusses the destructive impact this perverted mouth has on relationships, communities, and societies.[15] The church should certainly be listed as a place for potential destruction caused by perverse mouths.

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[11] Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 341. Similar to this stanza, Prov 16:27-30 describes similar behavior in speech (16:27; cf. 6:14a), creating conflict (cf. 16:14b); slander that separates friends (16:28; cf. 6:19), and gesturing behind ones back (16:29-30; c.f. 6:13).

[12] Richard Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 143.

[13] Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 341.

[14] Waltke, *The Book of* Proverbs, 342-43.

[15] Longman, *Proverbs*, 174.

Waltke suggests the insurrectionist leads persons who conspire with him, using speech and gestures.[16] Experience teaches that these wicked people are often charismatic and influential. Gifted in persuasion and intimidation, such wicked persons are masterful in selecting others who are easily misled to conspire with them. While the mouth is the most influential source of incitement, verse 14 speaks to the root of a wicked person's behavior, a perverse heart. The heart is the core from which all other thoughts and behaviors emanate. A Christian heart must be yielded to God, which would allow the Holy Spirit to transform the heart to conform it to the image of God. Waltke further asserts the person stirs up bitter conflict and discord in his relationships and community.[17]

God addresses behaviors he hates, both in the wicked and the saved. Proverbs 6:15 reveals the consequences of wicked behavior. The wicked person will be destroyed suddenly and decisively. Waltke writes, "The metaphor *he will be broken* implicitly compares the calamity the troublemaker deserves to his being broken violently apart and reduced to fragments like a ship being wrecked or the neck being broken.[18] Longman and Waltke agree that swift and decisive destruction is inevitable for the wicked.[19]

**Christians Must Detest What God
Detests (Prov 6:16-19)**

The second strophe of the third stanza of chapter 2 identifies characteristics God detests ("abominations" in the KJV). The first five actions the Lord hates concern moral character. The last two things God hates are specific types of persons that belong to a judicial or governmental setting. The term *abomination* uses the strongest language possible to emphasize the degree to which God abhors wicked behavior.

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[16] Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 343.

[17] Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 345.

[18] Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 345.

[19] Longman, *Proverbs*, 174; Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 345.

Duane Garrett says Proverbs 6:17-18 conveys the spiritual bankruptcy of the wicked: "The person whose eyes, hands, or feet carry out such deeds has a twisted soul and thus grossly corrupts the image of God that should be recognizable to every human."[20] He further observes that this list could be considered Israel's deadly sins.[21] Longman explains that this kind of pridefulness does not allow a person to accurately reflect on his own behavior.[22] Waltke calls it a denial of the Lord's authority.[23]

The impact of immature speech returns in this passage in a perverted lying tongue with willful malicious intent. Bruce Ross notes that the original word used here was also used in Jeremiah 14:14 to describe the false prophets who were deceiving people; in Isaiah 109:2 to describe a deceiver who betrays; and in Acts 1:20 to describe Judas.[24] Longman eloquently summarizes the impact of the lying tongue when he observes that lies twist reality.[25] While speech is often the first manifestation of an evil heart that leads to the shedding of innocent blood, feet eager to run to evil describes the zeal with which the evil person hastens to carry out the actions planned in the heart. Garrett suggests that the wicked person considers the occasion to carry out willful, planned sin as a fortunate opportunity; a stroke of good luck.[26] He continues saying that the phrasing denotes an angry person who lacks self-control—who intentionally kills

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[20] Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*, The New American Commentary, vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 98.

[21] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*, 97.

[22] Longman, *Proverbs*, 175.

[23] Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 346.

[24] Allen P. Ross, *Proverbs*, in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 935.

[25] Longman, *How to Read Proverbs*, 147.

[26] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 98.

another person for no justifiable reason. This person has no regard for human life and would murder to fulfill his own selfish desires.[27]

The author continues his diatribe on speech in Proverbs 6:19, but where Proverbs 6:16 referenced the tongue as a body part metaphor used for evil, this verse references the individual who lies, gossips, and causes others to view their target in an unfavorable light. Ross stated that a false witness, as described in this verse, is one who pours out lies and commits perjury.[28] Garrett agrees with Ross, arguing that the false witness is trying to subvert justice in the courts.[29]

The last thing God hates is the person who intentionally creates conflict among brothers. Waltke, Garrett, and Longman agree that brothers could mean siblings, relatives, or those in the community.[30] The impact is damaging, regardless of the relationship. Garrett says this conflict instigator "attempts to break apart the bonds that hold a society together.[31] The same holds true in a church. The effects can be felt for years and can be fatal to the life of a church.

In the New Testament, the epistle of James also examines foolish and wise choices, with emphasis on one's speech and actions. His message is for all Christians but interwoven in the fabric of this discourse is a strong message to Christian leaders about the influence their speech wields on others. He identifies the root of the problem and presents a Godly solution.

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[27] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 98.

[28] Ross, *Proverbs*, 935.

[29] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 98.

[30] Three authors mention the ambiguity in the term used for brothers in this passage. See Longman, *Proverbs*, 175; Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs*, 98; Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 348.

[31] Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 98.

Roots of Conflict in the Church

Proverbs 2 and 6 established God's standards of spiritual maturity. James 3 and 4 make a New Testament argument for demonstrating spiritual maturity. James argues that immature characteristics in believers create negative conflict in New Testament churches. Such characteristics exhibited by Christian leaders and teachers are particularly harmful to unity in the church. Such behaviors, especially speech, undermine both the mission and effectiveness of the church.

James is a brief, but complex book written to Jewish Christians dispersed abroad who likely fled persecution in Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen.[32] The most probable author, James, was the influential leader of the church in Jerusalem and the brother of Jesus. James's audience was experiencing persecutions (1:2-4); the ungodly rich were oppressing them (5:1-6); the religion of some was becoming a superficial formality (1:22-27; 2:14-26); and their own discriminatory practices revealed a lack of love and bitterness in speech and attitude (3:1-12–4:3). These factors negatively impacted James's intended audience's fellowship with each other. The fellowship was further disconnected by the lack of connection to, or consistent guidance from, the apostles or James.[33]

James wrote this epistle during a time of great political and societal unrest. Ralph Martin cites Roman policies designed to control Jewish freedom fighters; the Sadducean hierarchy's need to maintain status quo; and policies designed to serve the interests of some at the expense of others, as reasons for the conflict James addressed. Martin writes, "When policies are based on 'passions' and 'sinful pleasures' (Jas 4:1-2) they carry with them the seeds of their own destruction."[34]

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[32] Donald W. Burdick, *James*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 167.

[33] Burdick, *James*, 163.

[34] Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 156.

James Speaks about the Power
of the Tongue (Jas 3:1-12)

James 3 explores sins associated with speech, referred to as the tongue. At first glance, one might assume James is writing to leaders only. Douglas Moo provides an assessment of the obvious question—did James direct this passage to teachers only? He says scholars generally have two perspectives as to why James begins chapter 3 with a warning to teachers. The first perspective is that James simply opened this chapter with the warning as a transition from chapter 2 to chapter 3. The second perspective is that James was addressing not only those who desired to be teachers but also the problem of Christian leaders using their tongues improperly.[35] I combine these perspectives to emphasize how important it is for all Christians, but especially Christian leaders, to maintain wise speech.

Teachers, secular and Christian, have always been held to a higher standard in most cultures. During James's time, the role of the teacher was roughly the equivalent of the Rabbi in Jewish Culture.[36] They read the Scriptures to people for the purpose of transmitting Christian doctrine, and oral traditions.[37] Similar to a Rabbi, they too bore responsibility for the spiritual enlightenment of the people. The office of teacher was an influential position often sought after by charismatic status-seeking persons desiring elevated status and self-aggrandizement. This position influenced the ideology of the local church.[38]

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[35] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 148-49.

[36] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 148.

[37] Literacy was scarce during this time, so many to whom the teachers were teaching could not read and depended on the Rabbis and teachers to inform and interpret the Holy Scriptures.

[38] Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 16 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 152; Peter Davids, *Commentary on James*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 136; and Moo, *The Letter of James*, 147, reference the teacher's impact on persons they shared Scripture with, all implying that teachers were influential enough to lead others astray, or otherwise create negative consequences for those receiving the word of God.

James warns readers in James 3:1 that not everyone should aspire to a leadership position in the church, inferring that a considerable degree of spiritual maturity is needed to read and interpret scripture for others. James 3:1b identifies the reason James gives such a strong warning to those who would be teachers—teachers will receive stricter judgment. Jesus also warned teachers, specifically scribes, of a harsher judgment for abusing the office to which they were entrusted. Matthew 23:1-36[39] charges the scribes with taking advantage of widows, misdirecting God's people, and demonstrating pride and arrogance in their long prayers. It is no coincidence that Jesus's warning to the scribes refers to their use of speech as a predominant method of sin.

James includes himself in his admonition to teachers in James 3:1 (those who will receive stricter judgment) and continues to include himself in verse 2, saying that all stumble (sin). He is not saying that one is without sin but simply saying if one does not sin in speech, then he is spiritually mature and can control his own body. While most believe James is referring to the physical body, another theory is that the body he is referring to is the local church.

Martin is a leading proponent of this theory. He argues that since he is talking to teachers in the first few verses of James 3, it must have implications for the church and that the body refers to one's physical body but also the larger body, meaning the local church. His argument has logic because if a teacher has immature or uncontrolled speech, then it impacts those to whom he is speaking. Martin summarizes his perspective: "When the tongue itself is out of control, it can wreak havoc on that which it was meant to help; and an unrestrained teacher can adversely affect the entire community of faith."[40] Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell suggest James is highlighting the responsibility teachers

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[39] See also Mark 12:38-40 and Luke 20:45-47.

[40] Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 109-10.

have for the health of the church.[41] While this theory makes sense, other scholars acknowledge the theory, but cannot fully support the assertion.

Moo says while the possibility cannot be excluded, and there is truth in the perspective, it is unlikely that James meant the church body. He says there is no evidence to suggest the readers of the day would have been familiar with application of "body" language to the church. He further asserts that each time the word *body* is used, it is fully explained without any ecclesiological application, and James's use of "all" in verse 2b suggests he is reverting back to verse 1's reference to "many of you," and therefore is referring to the general readers of the epistle.[42] Luke Timothy Johnson writes that this passage should be interpreted as the whole body, defined as a person's physical movements and moral actions.[43]

Despite much debate over James's direction in this passage, there are clear implications for both individuals, leaders, and teachers in the local church. When individuals become leaders, the impact of their speech becomes magnified. For example, if individuals have a propensity toward speaking before thinking, then one can only imagine the impact that behavior pattern will have on the ministry to which they have been assigned, and the people with whom they will be working. This project acknowledges the debate about to whom James is speaking, but since he is speaking to Christians, his discourse is applicable to every aspect of the Christian life.

In James 3:3-6, James contrasts the power of something small, the tongue, and its impact on something larger. He begins with an illustration of comparison. Bits are tiny, but when placed in a horse's mouth, the rider can direct the movement of the horse, a much larger and far more powerful animal. He continues his illustration by comparing two larger

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[41] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 154.

[42] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 152.

[43] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 37A (New Haven, CT: Yale university Press, 1995), 255-56.

elements, a rudder, much larger than a bit, compared to a ship, much larger than a horse. The illustrations would have been quite familiar to his audience. Dan McCartney strongly states that horses and ships are only illustrations and are not metaphors for the church or for teachers exclusively.[44]

James 3:5-6 continues the illustration, and Moo points out that James changes the course of the conversation to add destruction to his illustrations. Using the tongue as a fire metaphor begins to illustrate the negative impact uncontrolled speech can have in the life of an individual and the church.[45] Moo further asserts, "The tongue, by virtue of being the most difficult of all parts of the body to control, becomes the conduit by which all the evil of the world around us comes to expression in us."[46] Jesus made comparable statements in Matthew 15:10-20 in his discourse about defilement. He spoke about the duplicity of speech and actions and told the elders that it was not what they ate that defiled them but what comes out of their heart through their speech that defiled them.

McCartney says the wicked establish a presence in the body (both individual and the church) by way of the tongue (speech), which can not only spoil one's integrity, but keeps the spoiling active, generating evil repeatedly.[47] James identifies the devil as the true source of the tongue's poison, when he says the tongue is set on fire by hell (Jas 3:7 CSB). Martin gleans an interesting point about teachers when he observes that great destruction is a short time away when teachers can sway congregations and introduce dissension.[48]

[44] Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 183.

[45] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 156.

[46] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 158.

[47] McCartney, *James*, 188.

[48] Martin, *James*, 116.

One would think if man had dominion over all the animals, one could easily control his speech, but that is not so. James 3:7-8 reminds his readers that they do not have total control. Blomberg and Kamell note James's reference to the order of the same animal groups listed in Genesis 1:26 and 9:2. James's allusion to creation recalls the divine mandate to the first humans to subdue all animal life.[49]

Moo observes the term *restless evil* found in James 3:8. First, he notes that James used the same word in James 1:8 to describe double-minded, unstable ways of man.[50] He also explains that the nature of the *restless evil* is uncertain and could mean either how difficult the tongue is to contain, or he could be thinking of the instability and lack of single-mindedness that characterizes the tongue. If the latter is the case, then he is leading into his argument in James 3:9-12.[51]

Donald Burdick points out that the tongue cannot be tamed by self, but a regenerate person's tongue can be tamed by the Holy Spirit.[52] God never told Adam he would have dominion over himself. God was to have dominion over human beings. This passage shows a Christian's complete dependence on God. If one can tame dangerous animals but cannot tame one's own mouth or attain one's own spiritual maturity, then it is unreasonable to assume that Christian speech will always be above reproach. While the wise person who actively seeks spiritual maturity will have fewer speech sins, Christians living in a fallen world will still sin. It is impossible for Christians to be perfect in speech or behavior. Conversely, being a disciple of Jesus requires one to surrender to His will and way.

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[49] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 159.

[50] Douglas J. Moo, *James*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 16 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1985), 127.

[51] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 162.

[52] Burdick, *James,* 188.

James continues his discourse on the duplicity of Christian speech in James 3:9-12. Moo notes that a *blessing* in this text is more than saying kind things to others. It is associated with praise and worship of God. *Cursing* carries the idea of calling on God to cut that person off from any blessings. Moo continues observing the differences: "If praising God is one of the highest forms of speech, cursing people is one of the lowest. . . what makes cursing especially evil is that the one whom we pronounce damned has been made in God's likeness."[53] Martin reminds readers that cursing is aimed at a fellow Christian in this passage.[54] Burdick gives further emphasis to this point when he asserts praising God and cursing men amounts to praising and cursing the same person because, as James 3:10 says, "we bless our Lord and Father and we curse people who are made in the image and likeness of God."[55]

Jesus spoke of the power of speech several times in the gospels,[56] and while James does not mention Jesus's teaching directly, he emphasizes those teachings in James 3 and 4. Moo notes that James sees speech as a barometer of one's spiritual maturity—speech reflects the heart. Jesus did likewise in Matthew 12:36-37[57] when he reminds Christians that they will account for every careless word said. James re-emphasizes Jesus's message in James 3:11-12. The point here is not about water[58] or fruit

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[53] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 163.

[54] Martin, *James*, 118.

[55] Burdick, *James*, 188.

[56] Matt 15:11-20 refers to eating, but in that passage, Jesus said it is not what goes in the mouth that defiles, but what comes out of the mouth that defiles. He further reminds the reader that what comes from the mouth originated from the heart, so if there is double minded speech, there is a heart that straddles the fence between righteousness and unrighteousness. In Matt 12:36-37, Jesus says trees are known by their fruit and that Christian fruit, speech, comes from the heart and exposes the authentic person.

[57] Moo, *James*, 129.

[58] McCartney writes that the reference to fresh water and saltwater stems from the water sources in Palestine where, particularly in the Rift Valley, there are springs so laden with minerals that they are poisonous to drink, whereas other springs, often found in caves, have clean water. McCartney, *James*, 193.

but about inconsistency and disobedience in the life of a Christian. A Christian's speech should not sound like it is guided by the Holy Spirit at times, and at other times sound like the depths of hell. James's illustrations simply point out that good speech comes from a good heart and hateful speech comes from a hateful heart. Blomberg and Kamell conclude that James's book is about content, competence, and character. The greatest of these is character. Speech comes from character and will reflect the essence of who one is, even when trying to live a public piousness that is inconsistent with behavior behind closed doors.[59]

**James Identifies the Source and Solution
to Conflict in The Church (Jas 4:1-12)**

James 4 shifts the focus to the impact selfish ambitions have on Christian speech and behavior. Martin (and others, including Moo and Davids) strongly proposes that James 4:1-10 is a continuation of James 3:13-18 and must be understood within this context.[60] He says these passages are a contrast between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom. James poses a series of rhetorical questions about the conflicts present in their churches and tells them they are caused by selfish ambitions and can only be resolved when they humble themselves before God.[61] Burdick writes,

> In 3:14-16 James has discussed a philosophy of life that is characteristic of the unregenerate mind and is a major ingredient of worldliness. In 4:1-10 he examines this worldly attitude in greater detail. First, he identifies the source of worldly antagonisms (4:1-3); next, he reproves spiritual unfaithfulness (4:4-6); and finally, he pleads for submission to God (4:7-10).[62]

[59] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 163.

[60] Martin, *James*, 142.

[61] Martin, *James*, 142.

[62] Burdick, *James*, 192.

Davids notes that the conflicts James is addressing are metaphorical and confined to the Christian community. He also asserts this passage is still referring to teachers, identified in James 3:1.[63]

Moo dissects various arguments about the terms used in this text, specifically, *war*, *quarrels*, and *kill* (murder). For example, does the term *kill* (murder) mean they were physically killing each other because of their sinful desires, or were they in verbal conflicts that could cause character assassination?[64] Johnson believes the passage must read this as actual killing, since killing could be a logical result of envy.[65] Moo concludes his dissection by saying the English counterparts of *polemoi*, *machai*, or *polemos* could refer to physical battle or verbal disputes.[66] Burdick agrees, but also says by the time James was written, these nouns had also become common, forceful expressions for any kind of open antagonism.[67] Martin believes it is reasonable to relate James's comments here with his diatribe on speech in James 3:1-12, but could not rule out physical murder since some Jewish Christians to whom he was writing were former Zealots.[68]

Interestingly, Martin promotes an argument that James is addressing the consequences of leader wrongdoing in James 4:1. His argument refers to the earlier discourse on speech and lack of wisdom in James 3 and he says teachers of the Word may have been spurred on by the political and social justice involvement of some of those influential leaders. Martin goes on to say he believes James is caught in the middle between warring factions—those who wanted peace and those who were ready to fight

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[63] Davids, *Commentary on James*, 156.

[64] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 182.

[65] Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 227.

[66] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 180.

[67] Burdick, *James*, 192.

[68] Martin, *James*, 144-45.

for the interests of national freedom. Such ideological distance was causing conflict among church members. The leaders had become consumed by their passions, which Martin describes as a lust for power, popularity, and authority.[69]

Johnson sees this passage as a continuation of the contrasting imagery of quarreling and peacemaking in James 3,[70] but Blomberg and Kamell disagree. They say it would be odd for James to expand on a *topos* of this kind for the sake of argument, so James must have been addressing real conflict. Martin believes the conflict included actual physical violence, depending on when James was written, but Blomberg and Kamell believe this conflict was mostly verbal, given James's writing in chapter 3. The Greek words for wars and fighting can be metaphorical as well. If the letter were written in the 40s, then they believe the terms would have referred to verbal sparring and criticism. James had to have been continuing his theme of right and wrong speech, according to Blomberg and Kamell. They further assert that the expression "warring in your members" could refer to internal strife within a person, external strife between fellow Christians, or both.[71]

James 4:2 has been interpreted in two ways. Davids suggests the verse should be interpreted as, "You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask (NKJV)."[72] He sees a chiastic structure when verses 2 and 3 are combined. On the other hand, Blomberg and Kamell believe it should be interpreted as it appears in the NASB: "You lust and do not

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[69] Martin, *James*, 144-45.

[70] Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 227.

[71] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 187.

[72] Davids, *Commentary on James*, 157-59.

have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask."[73]

While one can only speculate as to which interpretation is correct, James is exhorting his readers on the impact of selfish motives and envy. Bloomberg and Kamell further assert that it is possible James is echoing his brother's teaching in Matthew 7:7-8 and expanding on the theme of asking in James 4:2b-3. Jesus taught his followers that only those who asked from God would receive, and it seems reasonable to envision that twenty years later some are upset because they are not obtaining what they want. First, James reminds them that they need to ask to receive. The present tense of the verb suggests that they are to ask and keep asking.[74]

Matthew 7:7 says, "Ask, and it will be given to you, Seek, and you will find." Jesus says this within the context of alignment, asking and seeking God's kingdom and God's name. Johnson suggests the people to whom James wrote were approaching God with evil motives and that *wrong* is not a strong enough word to depict the actual gravity of their actions.[75] Blomberg and Kamell agree with Johnson's evaluation of the text.[76] Martin cautions commentators and readers who translate the term *murder* to only mean "hate." He says the letter was written when murder was an acceptable way to solve disagreements.[77]

In the opening of James 4:4, James admonishes his readers to repentance. Moo calls the opening of James 4:4 one of the most strongly worded calls to repentance and considers this to be the heart of James's letter because amid his exhortation about speech,

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[73] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 188.

[74] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 188-89.

[75] Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 278.

[76] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 189.

[77] Martin, *James*, 145.

envy, and divisiveness, he summons his readers to repent and turn back to God.[78] He further notes that James is referencing the often-used OT comparison of Yahweh and his people's relationship to that of a marriage.[79]

James's readers were blatantly disclaiming God and his teachings. Their behavior—discriminating against people (2:1-13), speaking inappropriately (3:1-12) and pursuing selfish ambitions (3:13-18)—indicated an allegiance to the world. An enemy, in this context, is someone who exhibits hostility toward God and His precepts. Moo writes, "God tolerates no rival. When believers behave in a worldly manner, they demonstrate that, at that point, their allegiance is to the world rather than to God."[80] Martin further adds that their behavior ranks them with the ungodly, even as James identifies them as Christians.[81]

James 4:5 is a difficult verse. Major translations do not agree on how to interpret this scripture. Moo discusses two major theories about this passage. First, James is referring to God's jealousy for His people. The second theory refers to the human tendency toward envy, which indicates that this passage refers to the Spirit God has placed within each person and one's own sinful enviousness.[82] Using the former theory, verse 5 substantiates verse 4 because verse 4 warns readers of the dangers of spiritual adultery, while verse 5 suggests that God gives a spirit inside that is for Him alone; he yearns for that place in the Christian life. When God's spirit is rejected and replaced with an affinity for the world, it stirs God's jealousy.[83]

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[78] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 186.

[79] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 187. When Israel's relationship is no longer committed to God, but entangled in idolatry with the world, it is said to be spiritual adultery. The book of Hosea is dedicated to this theme, modeled by the relationship the prophet Hosea had with his wife, Gomer.

[80] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 187.

[81] Martin, *James*, 149.

[82] NRSV, NASB, and NLT follow the God's jealousy for his people theory. NIV, REB, and TEV follow the human tendency to be envious theory.

[83] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 190.

James 4:6 informs that God is both jealous and merciful. One's response to such mercy is humility. James introduces this concept via Proverbs 3:34. Humility becomes the dominant theme in James 4:7-10. James exhorts his readers to humble themselves and turn back to God. To submit to God means to place oneself in submission to the Lordship of God in all things. The Greek verb, Moo continues, is *hypotasso*, and means "put in order under," suggesting a hierarchy of authority.[84]

Burdick identifies ten commands issued in James 4:7-10: submit, resist, come near, wash, purify, grieve, mourn, wail, change and humble. All are necessary for his readers to turn from their relationship with the world (*kosmos)* and return to the one true God.[85] "Resist the devil" in James 4:7 means to oppose, withstand, or stand against. Moo writes that the devil's primary purpose is to separate people from God. It is clear that "James sees his readers as both Christian and in need of a wake-up call that will bring home to them the seriousness of their departure from godly attitudes and behavior."[86] Moo further asserts that part of the submission back to God requires cleaning hands, purifying hearts, and mourning over the sin for which they now need grace and forgiveness. James called on his readers to remove anything that would suggest they were double minded in their actions. Martin thinks James did not view conflict between various factions as civil unrest or war, but viewed it as theologically based, an engagement between God and the world (i.e., Satan).[87]

Conclusion

The Word of God provides ample guidance on how to develop wisdom and grow spiritually. God especially desires leaders to be spiritually mature so they will display

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[84] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 192.

[85] Burdick, *James*, 194.

[86] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 194.

[87] Martin, *James*, 157.

Godly influence in the church. It is clear from the scriptures reviewed in this chapter that leaders must control their speech and maintain a humble posture before God and people. God does not honor prideful persons and scripture says immature persons will self-destruct if they do not humble themselves, repent, and turn back to God. Because of the conflict they can create in a church setting, church leaders must be chosen carefully using scriptures' teaching on becoming wise and spiritually mature.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL
ISSUES RELATED TO CONFLICT

Conflict is inevitable, but it need not be unhealthy for a local church

congregation. People learn conflict coping skills early in life and tend to prefer familiar

responses, which are often aggressive or avoidant. While these responses can be effective

in certain situations, they also exacerbate conflicts when used insensitively. Bob Phillips

notes that all conflicts have three components: (1) the people involved in the conflict care

about the issue; (2) the people involved disagree about the issue; and (3) the people

involved misunderstand each other about the issue.[1] This project argues that conflicts are

inevitable but solvable when treated as problem solving opportunities in which the parties

are as focused on the needs of others as they are on their own needs. This chapter will

examine this perspective by identifying factors that contribute to the complexity of

conflict; examining process strategies to approach conflict; promoting the benefits of a

problem-solving opportunity approach; and the importance of preparing leaders to

facilitate conflict resolution.

Factors Contributing to the Complexity of Conflict

Conflict can be defined as simply a disagreement between two or more parties,

but experts agree, conflict is complicated. Several factors increase the complexity and can

make communication about conflict more problematic. Differences in definition,

perception, and behavioral responses often combine to make resolutions difficult. This

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[1] Bob Phillips, *Overcoming Conflict: How to Deal with Difficult People and Situations* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2017), 15.

project identifies several factors that appear most influential in determining the outcome of a conflict event.

Lack of Agreement on Terminology and Definitions

Before a meaningful discussion on conflict resolution can occur, participants must define the terms. Terminology varies to include words such as *conflict resolution*, *conflict reconciliation*, *conflict transformation*, or *conflict management*. These terms should not be considered interchangeable because each carries its own meaning and carries broad implications for persons in conflict ministry. For example, this project's aim requires narrowing the focus to conflict resolution, although conflict reconciliation is a critical component of the overall process.

One could assume that everyone knows what conflict resolution is, but conflict mediators, reconcilers, and church consultants differ on meaning and context. Some authors choose not to define these concepts but instead describe circumstances and ensuing behaviors.[2] Other authors attempt to define conflict, but only for the context of their specific books.[3] Kenneth Gangel perhaps says it best, "Conflict is perhaps better described than defined. Usually, it includes a struggle over values and ideas, or perhaps power and resources."[4] Other authors, like Ken Sande, define conflict as a "difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires."[5] Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson describe this concept within a team environment as "relationship contention":

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[2] For an explanation of the behaviors and ensuing destructive results, see Ron Susek, *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). However, Susek's work does not give a concrete definition of conflict.

[3] Phillips, on the other hand, provides both Webster's dictionary definitions of conflict as well as descriptions of the impact conflict has on the church and its people. Phillips, *Overcoming Conflict*, 14.

[4] Kenneth O. Gangel, *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry: Using Multiple Gifts to Build a Unified Vision* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 186.

[5] Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 29.

"Relationship contention is a problem between two or more people that makes it difficult to work together."[6] K. Brynolf Lyon and Dan P. Moseley write, "Conflict emerges when we experience some kind of incompatibility among interests, projects, beliefs or needs."[7] Doug Bixby's definition, "Conflict is simply a disagreement between two or more parties within a family, community or organization,"[8] is simple enough to be memorized, yet implicitly suggests a complexity that requires implementation of a carefully designed resolution strategy. Bixby follows with his definition of conflict resolution: "Clearing up misunderstandings and reaching decisions in appropriate ways about important matters."[9]

Despite the complexities of defining terms, conflicts have common factors that can be examined. First, there is a level of disagreement over interests, beliefs, or practices. Second, parties are initially resistant to yield any part of their position. Third, there is an underlying problem present within the conflict that can be analyzed. Fourth, people often lack the necessary skill sets to successfully resolve conflict. Fifth, almost anyone can learn how to successfully resolve conflict. The Bible commands Christians to address conflict with their brothers and sisters. The remainder of the chapter will focus on responses to these commonalities, examination of one's motives and mindsets, and the importance of building skills sets.

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[6] Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson, *When Teams Work Best: 6,000 Team Members and Leaders Tell What It Takes to Succeed* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 43.

[7] K. Brynolf Lyon and Dan P. Moseley, *How to Lead in Church Conflict: Healing Ungrieved Loss* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2012), 8.

[8] Doug Bixby, *Navigating the Nonsense: Church Conflict and Triangulation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 3. Several writers make a clear distinction between conflict and disagreement. For example, Phillips asserts that a conflict represents a lack of communication, while a disagreement indicates some level of continuing communication that will lead to a resolution. Phillips, *Overcoming Conflict*, 15. Gangel concurs that disagreements can happen without conflict arising. Gangel, *Team Leadership*, 188.

[9] Bixby, *Navigating the Nonsense*, 3.

Conflict Is Viewed as Negative

        How one resolves conflict is often learned at an early developmental age. Because these skills are learned so early in life, they become ingrained in behavior patterns as learned behavior. A leader's response to conflict, therefore, is learned behavior that can be transformed in the mind and the heart to produce more effective behaviors. Phillips observes that conflict began when we left our mother's womb. By the time we are in our mid-sixties, Phillips continues, we have encountered hundreds of conflict situations.[10] If a child learns that conflict should be viewed negatively, then that concept will often follow that child into adulthood and into relationships with others.

        How does one respond to conflict? Several factors can be considered. First, extreme reactions, such as fight or flight responses, are common in conflict situations. God equipped humans to respond to a true life and death situation. Hormones in the brain send messages to tell one when to stop before having a car accident, or to leave a place that appears dangerous. Many people, including Christians, respond similarly to stimuli that is not life threatening or dangerous, such as a conflict with another person.[11] When one's response is fight or flight, one will respond defensively and passively. LaFasto and Larson share insight into this response:

> The two most common forms of defensiveness are, ironically, very opposite behaviors: counterattack or withdrawal. This is the famous "fight or flight" syndrome. We get most intense and are most apt to be defensive about issues important to us, especially when the outcome is not what we think it should be, or when our sense of fairness has been violated. It is at this point that we may feel compelled to fight—to counterattack. The counterattack will escalate into a head-knocking disagreement. Alternatively—we may choose to flee—to deal with the threat by withdrawing from the confrontation. Although this defensive behavior is passive, it is just as debilitating to teamwork and equally potent at stifling collaboration.[12]

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[10] Phillips, *Overcoming Conflict*, 15.

[11] Harvard Medical School, "Understanding the Stress Response," July 6, 2020, https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response.

[12] LaFasto and Larson, *When Teams Work Best*, 44.

Responding in an unhelpful manner is likely to make the conflict worse. George W. Bullard contends that theology shapes one's approach to conflict. In his discourse, he contrasts theological views on power and control with respect to God and Satan, and surmises that Satan produces negative, unhealthy approaches to conflict.[13] Such behaviors include angry outbursts, jealousy, scheming, manipulative behaviors to get one's way, or inappropriate, demeaning speech. Ungodly behavior produces negative responses and hinders effective communication.

One may not be cognizant of Satan's effect on conflict responses. Once Christians become aware of biblical principles related to conflict, they may realize that the way they tend to handle conflict situations may be unbiblical, or even sinful. Adjusting negative responses to more Christ-like responses will produce more effective outcomes.

Multiple Approaches to Resolving Conflict

There is no one best approach to conflict. Gangel claims that conflict resolution experts have identified more effective and less effective patterns for handling conflict. He lists confronting, smoothing, compromise, forcing, and withdrawal as more effective than confronting, forcing, withdrawal, smoothing, and compromise.[14] Because there are so many levels and intricacies in conflict situations, experts have created a plethora of plans, processes, and methods of resolving conflict. The most widely respected model with an assessment tool is the Thomas-Kilman Conflict Model. This model has been validated by thousands of respondents since 1974, both in the United States and globally. This model measures assertiveness behavior, the degree to which one attempts to get their needs met, and cooperative behavior, the degree to which one seeks to meet the needs of others.[15]

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[13] George W. Bullard, *Every Congregation Needs a Little Conflict* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2008), 13.

[14] Gangel, *Team Leadership*, 190.

[15] This model has also been adopted by others. Michael Hare includes The Conflict Management Style Survey, which uses the Thomas-Kilman model, but uses other survey questions to determine primary conflict styles. Michael Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 228.

Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilman identify five responses to conflict and assert that people tend to use one or two predominantly. The five styles are (1) avoiding, unassertive and uncooperative; (2) accommodating, unassertive and cooperative; (3) competing, assertive and uncooperative; (4) compromising, moderately assertive and moderately cooperative; and (5) collaborating, assertive, and cooperative.[16] They further explain that each style has appropriate and inappropriate uses. Conflict can be exacerbated when the wrong style is used to attempt resolution.

In addition to the Thomas-Kilman model, another model worth noting is Ron Susek's Firestorm model that has six phases using a fire analogy, and each phase has a specific process.[17] The Firestorm Model phases are (1) Sparks; (2) Sparks Igniting a Firestorm; (3) Firestorm in Full Fury; (4) Consuming Winds; (5) The Final Burn; and (6) Rebuilding on Burnt Timbers. He advocates interpersonal communication, mediation, and external church consultants, when needed, to resolve conflict. Whereas the Thomas-Kilman Model identifies behavioral tendencies in individuals, Susek's model is more systemic and best suited for churches in crisis situations.

Regarded as one of the more heralded Christian approaches to conflict, Sande's Peacemaker process is highly effective in personal conflict situations. He says people often use ineffective conflict responses to attempt to resolve conflict. He refers to avoidant types of responses as peace-faking responses because they do not resolve issues. He sees aggressive types of responses as peace-breaking responses because they are likely to sever communication and relationships with others.[18] True peacemaking efforts include overlooking an offense that is of no real significance to the offended party, reconciliation,

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[16] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 237.

[17] Susek, *Firestorm*, 237.

[18] Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 23.

negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and accountability. He argues these are the only authentic means to promote resolution and reconciliation.

Sande's model uses four principles of peacemaking and suggests readers ask themselves questions to achieve the principle. First, "Glorify God" asks one to consider "how can I please and honor the Lord in this situation?" Second, "Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye" requires one to respond to the question, "How can I show Jesus's work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict?" "Gently Restore" is the next principle, asking, "How can I lovingly serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?" The last principle, "Go and Be Reconciled," requires one to ask, "How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict?"[19]

Michael Hare fosters a process that promotes incorporating building a team who will facilitate church conflicts. His model focuses on mapping the conflict, identifying the type of conflict, then analyzing the root cause by examining the issues and values surrounding the conflict. He uses a survey instrument that appears to combine another tool, Hall's Conflict Management Survey, and the Thomas-Kilman Instrument.[20]

Another perspective on truly harmful conflict suggests that it is the product of a malevolent antagonist who is determined to cause harm. Kenneth Haugk defines antagonists as "individuals who, based on non-substantive evidence, go out of their way to make insatiable demands, usually attacking the person or performance of others. These attacks are selfish in nature, tearing down rather than building up, and are frequently directed against those in a leadership capacity."[21] This type of conflict can be resolved as a problem, but will most likely lead to removal of that person from a leadership position,

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[19] Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 263.

[20] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 229.

[21] Kenneth C. Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 25.

ministry, or fellowship because they cannot be reasoned with and are unwilling to yield their adversarial stance.

When one views conflict only from a negative perspective, one fails to consider options, possibilities, and opportunities. Hare identifies and explains three types of conflict as unhealthy, benign, and healthy. First, unhealthy conflict is destructive and may go unrecognized until interpersonal disputes and factions begin to develop. These conflicts are easy to recognize once they surface. Second, benign conflicts develop over organizational deficits and oversights that are unintentional. For example, church growth that is now causing limited space for meetings and activities may cause double booking of space. The resolution might be a new system for room reservation. Third, healthy conflict refers to disagreements that are recognized, acknowledged, and responded to in a biblically constructive manner.[22]

Phillips shares a more fundamental perspective when he identifies four levels of conflict. His first level is a difference of opinion that leads to a confrontation he calls a *spat*. An unresolved spat leads to the next level, a *quarrel*. A quarrel is a heated debate that leads to *division* among the parties. If a quarrel is unresolved, it will escalate into a *fight*. A fight is characterized by intense physical anger, which leads to rejection by other parties in the conflict. If this level is unresolved, it will lead to *war*, characterized by hostility that leads to separation.[23]

Bullard claims that every congregation needs healthy conflict and provides a seven-level intensity conflict model to identify whether a conflict is healthy or unhealthy. Like Hare and Phillips, he asserts that healthy conflict needs a different approach than unhealthy conflict. Bullard differs in that, while some scholars use the terms conflict resolution, conflict mediation, and conflict management interchangeably, or with minor

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[22] Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens*, 21.

[23] Phillips, *Overcoming Conflict*, 65.

differences in definition, he believes the terms are much more diverse and are all processes. He assigns levels 1 and 2 to conflict resolution, levels 3 and 4 to conflict mediation and levels 5 through 7 to conflict management. He goes on to say conflict resolution should only be used for intensity level 1, typical issues with many solutions, or intensity level 2, common disagreements over multiple issues, because in conflict resolution processes, if one can easily determine the root cause of the conflict, the issues can be easily resolved (relatively speaking) and forgiveness can take place because the conflict is permanently resolved.[24] He further asserts that no conflict, at any level, can be truly resolved until it is broken down to the root cause. Lastly, he believes conflict resolution creates a win-win for the parties involved and is healthy for the congregation.

Bullard defines conflict mediations as short-term and long-term agreements that help the congregation move forward. Bullard's definition of conflict mediation does not resolve specific issues but provides a plan for going forward with an agreed upon new foundation for the future. He believes a conflict mediation process is best for intensity level 3, competition within a group or between groups, or level 4, congregational wide competition with voting.

Bullard defines the conflict management process as external control and directing the conflict because the participants are unable to do so. This strategy works in unhealthy conflict situations where the parties cannot reach agreement on their own. This strategy works best for intensity levels 5 through 7 because the conflict will intensify to levels of irreparable emotional and physical harm if an appropriate intervention does not happen.

Jim Van Yperen contributes a slightly different but compelling perspective when he asserts that most conflict root causes lie in four systemic issues: (1) cultural issues, (2) structural issues, (3) spiritual issues, and (4) theological issues. He defines

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[24] Bullard, *Every Congregation Needs a Little Conflict*, 123-25.

culture as "a complex system of assumptions, practices, stories and beliefs that guide how a common people think and act as well as what they value." Van Yperen claims culture influences the local church to such an extent as the Western church looks and acts more like contemporary culture than the kingdom of Christ. This influence creates churches that are focused on individualism rather than discipleship, and the fruit one bears is more a product of consumerism that "gives to get" rather than gives out of true obedience and worship of God.[25]

Van Yperen next discusses what is often a root cause of conflict: structural issues. He defines structure as "the interrelationship of external and internal forces that influence our decisions and create the conditions for conflict. A system dynamic is a structure that underlies the way we organize, work, lead, and make decisions in organizations, including churches."[26] Leaders must understand the impact structure plays in effective operations, change management, and interpersonal relationships. Effective conflict resolution at the structural level must "examine, identify, and confess past failure; identify root needs, causes, or flaws in character, behavior, or thinking; unlearn negative habits practiced over time; relearn new habits of behavior and thinking; and reconstitute personal character and church culture."[27]

Van Yperen's research revealed much about leader behavior. He says most seminaries train pastors to think, speak, and act alone, making it difficult for them to develop and work within a team-based environment. Consequently, pastors are ill-equipped to address interpersonal or intergroup conflict, nor can they train other leaders on this topic. They also struggle to objectively see their potential role in a conflict event. Individualistic pastors tend to use one of two approaches to conflict. Some use a legalistic

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[25] Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict* (Chicago: Moody, 2002), 28-31.

[26] Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 37.

[27] Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 38.

approach in which the leader has centralized control and hierarchical management. Other

leaders may use a democratic approach, which encourages decentralization of authority

and a flatter management structure. Both styles are inadequate because conflicts require

spiritual discernment, repentance, and forgiveness.[28]

Van Yperen continues his discourse by sharing his observations regarding what

he believes is the root cause of conflict: a spiritual crisis. He boldly indicts the church for

failing to be the church as Jesus intended:

> Many of our churches have lost (or never found) a balanced understanding of holiness
> and application of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We do not know what it
> means or what it would look like to live in, walk by, and sow to the Holy Spirit . . .
> we are most in conflict because we are not what we claim to be. Our churches lack
> "spiritual authenticity. . . . Many of our churches are sick and dying because they
> are pretending to be the church."[29]

Van Yperen says that Christians are susceptible to cultural, spiritual, and

structural influences because they often have a weak theological framework in which to

view God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. This susceptibility challenges the church's

spiritual integrity. He further claims the Western church has exchanged spiritual integrity,

defined as "undivided in relationship to God, self and others," with spiritual autonomy,

defined as "independent, self-ruling with individual preferences, privacy and rights"

prevailing over true unity in the church.[30]

Multiple approaches to conflict resolution were not designed to increase

complexity in conflict resolution, but they clearly demonstrate the complexity because

one approach will not work in all situations. A review of the literature on church conflict

can easily overwhelm church leaders seeking immediate answers to their church conflict.

As difficult as it is, however, it would be prudent for leaders to identify processes that may

meet their specific need and provide training for all ministry leaders in the local church.

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[28] Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 39-51.

[29] Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 40-41.

[30] Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 44.

**Conflict Resolution Is a
Teachable Skill Set**

Conflict resolution is a teachable skill, but most church leaders are not provided

appropriate training on this critical topic. Lyon and Moseley's work suggests that

congregations in conflict have a difficult time using available resources. They also suggest

that leaders need practical theological understanding of conflict that offers dialogue in the

dynamics of leading a conflict situation.[31] Concepts of conflict resolution can also be

difficult to teach because of psychological and emotional dynamics. Church leaders could

benefit from generic training on concepts of conflict but would be better equipped if

provided with specific training on the types of conflict their church experiences. Inadequate

training and a misconception of conflict as only being negative contribute to conflict

complexities related to training.

**Sin Nature Resists the Command
to Pursue Peace**

James 3:16 reminds readers that selfish ambition cannot co-exist with wisdom

and peace. The Bible uses the phrase *selfish ambition* to demonstrate one who lacks

humility and exhibits a "me first" approach to life experiences. Throughout Scripture one

sees the destruction selfish ambitions cause in the Christian life. Whether the conflict is

defined as a conflict, antagonism, or ignorance, the root cause of such behavior is sin.

There is a difference between a disagreement that is easily resolved by humble

people communicating well, and haughtier disagreements that lead to sin. Ken Sande and

Kevin Johnson observe that Western culture is bombarded with self-serving messages:

"We are taught that life is all about me and we have rights to do what we want, when we

want and how we want. For that reason, conflict for Christians is inescapable. The

authors go on to say that we cannot escape because we are all products of our own

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[31] Lyon and Moseley, *How to Lead in Church Conflict*, 19.

misguided desires, and even if we tried to escape, conflict would still follow us."[32] Sande and Johnson continue, "Conflict happens among Christians because our sinful self gladly cooperates with messages that say, 'I can have whatever I want.' We fail to resist such temptation because we choose to fail to resist."[33]

Leader Behaviors Generate Detrimental
Contribution to Conflict Situations

Christian leaders are bound by much more than conflict management as defined by secular institutions and organizations. At stake is the representation and reputation of God on earth. Consequences are eternal both for the leader and the congregation. Relationships are not marginal; they are essential for forgiveness and reconciliation. Susek contends, "The work of the church leader is not just about dealing with a problematic situation or member, but rather teaching people who act like wolves how to become or return to being sheep."[34]

As helpful as leaders should be, leaders can also have a detrimental impact on conflict resolution in several ways. First, leaders sometimes fail to rely on God's direction. Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hendry describe four leader-follower relationships that are always ineffective. They use a term EGO, meaning Edging God Out, and say that EGO interferes with clear communication and conflict resolution because God is left out of the process.[35] The first relationship is a prideful leader + a prideful follower. This relationship is characterized by self-promotion and the desire to

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[32] Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 14.

[33] Sande and Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict*, 15.

[34] Susek, *Firestorm*, 136.

[35] Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus: Revisited* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 202.

win.[36] The second relationship is a fearful leader + a fearful follower. This relationship is characterized by suspicion, information withholding, and a desire to justify fear based on another person's behavior. Third, a prideful leader + a fearful follower. This relationship is characterized by the leader's desire to impose their will and way on the follower, using intimidation and exploitation of known insecurities. The last relationship is a fearful leader + a prideful follower. This relationship is characterized by the leader succumbing to follower manipulation so the leader attempts to exert position power to regain a position of strength.[37]

Second, church members often look to the leader for guidance and support in resolving conflict. Some even assume the leader will resolve the conflict for them by communicating member positions to others involved in the conflict. Bixby labels this practice as *triangulation*. *Triangulation* is defined as relationships where at least three people interact with each other about one issue. Triangulation exists when Person C finds themselves in the middle of a conflict between Person A and Person B.[38] This trap happens frequently when well-meaning leaders, serious about a commitment to their members, attempt to lead them in conflict resolution. They find themselves amid a conflict in which they should have encouraged members to resolve themselves, through open communication, rather than leader over-involvement. Leaders are not the only persons who are subject to triangulation.

A third behavior that can cause detrimental impact is a failure to adequately prepare for a conflict situation. This can be true for any conflict but causes abject failure when a congregation is faced with a serious church-impacting internal conflict that requires all leaders to work together to resolve conflict. This usually describes the most serious

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[36] Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus*, 202.

[37] Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus*, 203.

[38] Bixby, *Navigating the Nonsense*, xvii.

church conflicts, which, if not resolved, can destroy the church. Haugk implores leaders to prepare themselves tactically and strategically for dealing with antagonists—the most difficult type of person to hold accountable in a conflict. Since antagonists feel most comfortable in a group setting, Haugk continues by saying leaders must prepare for group situations, presenting a united front, and the difficult decisions that may need to be made.[39]

Van Yperen offers a fourth perspective:

> Conflict is always about leadership, character, and community. Leaders are not the cause of all conflict, as more comes from the pews than the pulpit . . . but a leader will respond to conflict out of his or her character regardless of knowledge or training. . . . Conflict reveals the true character of a leader. . . who we are is revealed by how we react to persecution.[40]

When leaders demonstrate unbiblical responses, such as aggression or defensiveness, Van Yperen argues they are demonstrating a self-centeredness (self-deception) that elevates them above the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Leaders should never make conflict about them. Conflict should be about submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ. A mature leader points the parties to Jesus and gets out of the way. [41]

Lastly, leaders with poor verbal communication skills wreak havoc in conflict situations. Despite the plethora of information available to improve communication skills, people are often deficient in communicating effectively in difficult, critically important situations. Patterson et al., call these moments *crucial conversations. Crucial conversations* can be defined as "a discussion between two or more people where (1) stakes are high, (2) opinions vary, and (3) emotions run strong."[42] The authors go on to say, "When we need to communicate at our best, we often communicate at our worst."[43] Patterson et al.

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[39] Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church*, 150.

[40] Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 25.

[41] Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 162.

[42] Kerry Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 3.

[43] Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations*, 9.

write, "At the heart of almost all chronic problems in our organizations, teams and relationships lie crucial conversations – ones that we're either not holding or not holding well."[44]

This project highlights selected illustrations of the detrimental behavior leaders apply to conflict resolution efforts. Project time and space constraints do not allow inclusion of other detrimental causes such as moral failure, spiritual immaturity, and insufficient knowledge of how to apply Scripture. Successfully addressing triangulation, inadequate preparation, and poor communication skills may dissipate other issues that may be problematic.

Common Ground among Complexities

The volume of literature on church conflict leads one to believe that there are numerous root causes of conflict in the church. A review of the literature suggests that most conflicts can be effectively addressed if four components are in place: (1) open and respectful communication; (2) reliance on God for direction; (3) early intervention; and (4) viewing conflict as an opportunity to improve oneself or church rather than viewing it as a negative experience.

While these components are critical to conflict resolution, without a mindset shift and a transformed heart, none of the components will transform conflicts into resolvable challenges. Successful conflict resolution without reconciliation and forgiveness will yield only temporary solutions. Transformation yields not only a plan for conflict but also allows the church to move forward and achieve greater glory for God.

Transforming Leader Perspective on Conflict

Leader perspective influences congregational perspective. Healthy leaders promote healthy subordinate leaders who promote a healthy congregation. Likewise,

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[44] Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations*, 9.

insecure leaders create conflict in churches by creating instability and opportunity for power struggles. Domineering leaders create conflict using fear and intimidation. Avoidant leaders create conflict when they fail to address issues and leave others, with whom they should be mentoring, feeling like they are on their own with respect to decision making and leading. Unhealthy leaders create conflict opportunities rooted in mistrust and pride and their behavior patterns are duplicated by subordinate leaders.

Like sanctification, leadership is ever evolving. For the Christian and non-Christian leader alike, transformation of one's heart and mind are ever evolving. Romans 12:2 reminds Christians to seek transformation via the renewing of one's mind. Numerous scriptural passages, including, but not limited to, Psalm 14:1, Proverbs 4:23, Jeremiah 17:9-10, Mark 7:6-7, 14-23, and Luke 6:45 remind that hearts can be sinful and easily deceived. From what is in the heart, flows behaviors.

The Heart Must Change

The human heart is a battleground for conflict. Numerous passages in the Bible warn of the deceitfulness of the heart. Jeremiah 17:9-11 reminds that our hearts can be deceived, but God sees our true hearts even if we have become self-deceived. Jesus spoke often about the condition of the heart, especially the heart of the religious leaders. In Matthew 5, he reminds all Christ followers that murder, unrighteous anger, and adultery begin in the heart. He continues his discourse commanding Christians to love their enemies and pray for those who mistreat others. This transformation of the heart can only manifest through the Holy Spirit working on the heart.

Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry have much to say about the heart. They contend a leader's greatest hindrance to providing Godly leadership lies in one's ego. Their use of the word as an acronym for Edging God Out (EGO) profoundly interprets the impact ego has on leader behavior. EGO emanates from the heart. They write, "Edging God Out as

the one you worship, as your source of security, self-worth, and wisdom, and as your primary audience results in two EGO problems: pride and fear."[45]

The manifestation of this pride and fear in a leader is demonstrated in several ways. First, leaders become separated from God, themselves, and others because their hearts are filled with behaviors designed to self-promote and self-protect. Second, leaders tend to compare themselves to others, which creates discontentment. Conflict is inevitable when leaders' hearts are filled with selfish desires. Third, leader perception becomes distorted, leaving a false sense of security and a fundamental mistrust of others.[46]

Leaders who are filled with pride and fear react to situations and events. This is particularly true for persons thrust into conflict situations. The insecurities associated with a heart filled with pride and fear can cause more conflict internally and externally and will make it difficult for a leader to resolve conflict with grace and forgiveness. Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry recommend that leaders follow Jesus's model for leadership. Leading like Jesus would lead one to be quick to listen, slow to judge or become angry, and willing to let someone else receive praise.[47]

Christian leaders make a choice to respond or react to an event or conflict. A response is more effective than a reaction, according to Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry. Responsiveness allows one to emotionally refrain from reacting in a manner unbecoming a Christian or reacting purely from emotion without the discernment to reason. Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry also provide a remedy to Edging God Out and proposes that leaders Exalt God Only, which also uses the acronym EGO. When leaders Exalt God Only, God becomes the singular object of their worship, the source of their security, self-worth and

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[45] Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus*, 53.

[46] Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus*, 63.

[47] Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus*, 54.

wisdom, and the audience and authority of their (the leader) life.[48] Through this heart and mind transformation, leaders demonstrate consistent humility and God-grounded confidence to lead others.

In Matthew 15:10-19, Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that the heart defines every person. When one exhibits evil behaviors, verbal and non-verbal, it does not come from the mouth, but the heart. Alfred Poirier concurs that conflict begins in the heart. He reminds Christians that "the conflicts people are in are conflicts in people—conflicts in their hearts, conflicts of desires, demands, and idols."[49] All contribute to conflict and the inability to resolve conflict with grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

The Mind Must Change

Observation leads one to wonder why leaders struggle with leading others and struggle even more with conflicts within a church setting. The Arbinger Institute offers a compelling theory that explains why leaders, regardless of their knowledge of technical processes for resolving conflict, or who have well-established leadership credentials, still create negative impacts on organizations, including the church. Their theory's foundation lies in human beings being self-deceived and this self-deception carries into interactions with others. Self-Deception Theory says people are blind to some of their behavioral tendencies and the impact those behaviors have on interactions with others.[50] When leaders are blind to their behaviors but cognizant of blind spots in others, distorted thinking occurs and communication and subsequent behaviors stem from that distorted place. This theory is not exclusive to leaders; all are prone to self-deception. Arbinger Institute explains,

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[48] Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus*, 78.

[49] Alfred Poirier, *The Peace-Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 70.

[50] Arbinger Institute, *Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2018), 16.

Arbinger's work explores the possibility that we humans are in large part self-deceived about what kind of beings we are and why we act as we do, and the quality of living available to us if we can bring our self-deceptions to an end. To say that we might be self-deceived is to say that our beliefs about ourselves and about each other are more than merely false. They are instead falsifications—distortions of our experience for which we ourselves are responsible. In other words, we are failing, both individually and as a culture, to understand ourselves—not because of an inability to do so, but because of a willful refusal to do so. Our mindset—the fundamental manner in which we regard ourselves and others—is a systemic and deep-seated deception of ourselves by ourselves.[51]

The apostle Paul explores this issue in several passages of Scripture, including 1 Corinthians 13:1 and Romans 12. James speaks of the duplicity of self-deception when he warns his readers not to be double minded in their ways, a characteristic of self-deception in James 1:22-26. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah 17:9 speaks to the deceitfulness of the heart and the necessity to examine the mind and test the heart.

Arbinger's theory of self-deception says people have either an inward or outward mindset. Mindset informs which behaviors a person chooses and the effectiveness of those behaviors.[52] One exhibits an inward mindset when one views people as objects. This mindset describes people who exhibit behaviors that are self-centered, narcissistic, elitist, or prejudice. When one views people, not as people who are equal and who have needs and interests that are just as important as theirs, but as people who are less valuable with less important interests and position, then the inward focused person begins to engage in a narrative to justify their perspective on people.[53] Once the faulty narrative solidifies, that inwardly focused person thinks and acts from that perspective and cannot see others' perspectives.

When one has an outward mindset, one sees people as important. They are others focused, recognizing that their needs are not the only needs to consider in a

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[51] Arbinger Institute, "The Intellectual Foundations of the Arbinger Institute," accessed February 17, 2022, https://arbinger.com/SecureDownload?file=Whitepaper_Intellectual_Foundations.pdf, 1.

[52] Arbinger Institute, *The Outward Mindset: How to Change Lives and Transform Organizations* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2019), 17.

[53] Arbinger Institute, *The Outward Mindset*, 86.

conflict or when a decision needs to be made. Arbinger's research shows that outward mindset people follow a three-step process: they (1) see the needs, objectives and challenges of others; (2) adjust their efforts to be more helpful to others; and (3) measure and hold themselves accountable for the impact of their work on others.[54] This process does not suggest that an outward mindset is a prescribed method, but rather a genuine effort to see the needs, objectives, and challenges of others so they may be more helpful to them.[55]

Skill Sets Needed to Resolve Conflict

Changing one's mindset and heart from an inward focus to an outward focus creates opportunities for new avenues to resolve conflict and reconcile with others. When one is aware of the power he or she possesses through the Holy Spirit to resolve conflicts, then one may also view conflict differently and acknowledge that all conflict is not negative.

Abdul Ghaffar's research in school systems reveals the difference in impact between positive and negative conflict events. He sees conflict as negative when it, "(1) hampers productivity; (2) lowers morale; (3) causes more and continued conflicts; or (4) causes inappropriate behaviors."[56] Ghaffar believes conflict is healthy, especially in a team-based environment. "Healthy conflict is necessary because it (1) helps to raise and address problems; (2) energizes work on the most appropriate issues; (3) helps people "be real," for example, it motivates them to participate; and (4) helps people learn how to recognize and benefit from their differences."[57]

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[54] Arbinger Institute, *The Outward Mindset*, 74.

[55] Arbinger Institute, *The Outward Mindset*, 92.

[56] Abdul Ghaffar, "Conflict in Schools: Its Causes & Management Strategies," *Journal of Managerial Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2009): 212.

[57] Ghaffar, "Conflict in Schools," 213.

Several skills are required to successfully resolve conflict. The most important skills are not conflict tools at all, but rather fundamentals of the Christian faith. Without learning the teachings of the Bible with respect to interactions with others, the tools commonly used to improve communication will produce fruit of the flesh. For example, good verbal communication skills are needed to effectively resolve conflict; however, an unchanged heart will accommodate the sin of self-deception, which will use training of verbal communications skills as a weapon for self-serving purposes. Recipients of training will become more proficient at using verbal communication to manipulate and seek one's own way rather than developing a workable solution to the conflict. Without a Godly heart and mindset, when one is taught ways to improve one's communication skills, one will become a craftier manipulator because of the improved communication skills. In a conflict event, those skills will allow that individual to be more persuasive and influential in the quest to have their needs met. The conflict may be resolved but not necessarily with a permanent workable solution that both resolves the conflict and reconciles the parties to each other and to God.

To successfully navigate conflict, a leader needs Godly skills. First, one must be committed to obedience to the Holy Spirit for guidance and follow the Godly principles taught in the Bible. God must be the object of worship and whom one seeks to glorify. Too often, carnal mindedness emerges that prevents one from seeing beyond his or her own motives. Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry say putting God in his rightful place allows one to abide in his unconditional love. They elaborate,

> God's love will change you and, by extension, change your leadership. You will see leadership differently. It becomes less about power and control and more about the stewardship of the people you touch and of the work God has given you to do. You will see people differently, too; rather than seeing them as a means to accomplish the results you want, you realize that God has the same love for them that he has for you. Work becomes an act of worship and your workplace an outpost of God's kingdom. You are no longer threatened by feedback; you no longer lead out of fear or cause others to be fearful of you. Accepting and abiding in God's unconditional

love changes you and lays the foundation for . . . habits that will help you lead like Jesus.[58]

The next skill a leader needs to successfully resolve conflict is humility. Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry declare that humility must be genuine. They go on to define *humility* as

> realizing and emphasizing the importance of other people. . . . The humility Jesus demonstrated did not rise from a lack of self-esteem, love, power, or ability. His humility came from the fact that He knew whose He was, who He was, where He came from, and where He was going. That understanding freed Him to treat people with love and respect.[59]

The Arbinger Institute writes,

> Leaders who succeed are those who are humble enough to be able to see beyond themselves and perceive the true capacities and capabilities of their people. They don't pretend to have all the answers. Rather, they create an environment that encourages their people to take on the primary responsibility for finding the answers to the challenges they . . . face.[60]

A companion to humility is compassion—another skill leaders need to successfully resolve conflict. Deborah Hunsinger and Theresa Latini make several observations. First, they discuss Swiss theologian Karl Barth's assertion that "one cannot understand what it means to be fully human by looking only at ourselves and our experiences."[61] Hunsinger and Latini continue,

> Compassionate leadership, which has the potential to transform conflict, respects the creatureliness of human beings. Compassionate leaders see others in their full humanity . . . when we address one another with openness and respect . . . acknowledge mutual need of another person . . . listen to others with compassion and love . . . support the freedom of each individual to take responsibility for his or her thoughts, feelings, and actions, we honor our humanity.[62]

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[58] Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus*, 93.

[59] Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus*, 80.

[60] Arbinger Institute, *The Outward Mindset*, 9.

[61] Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger and Theresa F. Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict: Compassionate Leadership in Action* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 14.

[62] Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 18.

Another critical skill leader's need to successfully resolve conflicts is awareness of their Christian responsibility to be a peacemaker. Poirier reminds leaders that "God is the chief and foremost peacemaker, and we are his servants, his ambassadors of reconciliation. We do not work alone in our endeavors to call men to be reconciled to God and to one another. God is with us—the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."[63] Sande reminds leaders that

> Peacemakers are people who breathe grace. They draw continually on the goodness and power of Jesus Christ, and then they bring His love, mercy, forgiveness, strength, and wisdom to the conflicts of daily life. God delights to breathe his grace through peacemakers and use them to dissipate anger, improve understanding, promote justice, and encourage repentance and reconciliation. . . . As an elder in my church, I have also watched God work through committed peacemakers to preserve and actually improve congregational unity as we wrestled through serious differences over vision, leadership roles, finances, worship style, staffing, children's education, and building programs.[64]

Once the Christlike attributes have been taught to leaders who seek transformation, conflicts will be easier to manage because all will seek to be genuinely Christ-like and loving toward one another. However, conflict will still exist and there is a need to teach specific tools to enhance skills. Communication tools (verbal and non-verbal), active listening, and negotiation and mediation skills are necessary tools, but are most effective when the heart has been transformed from self-focus to a focus on others.

Appropriate Training and Mentoring
Must Be Available

Leaders in a church setting should not be expected to know how to lead simply because they were selected for ministry leadership. In the same way one is taught to ride a bicycle, drive a car, or cook, one must also be taught fundamental leadership skills. At the minimum, an adequate training program for leaders should include the following:

1. Biblical and theological training sufficient to determine if the leader's beliefs are aligned with the church's beliefs.

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[63] Poirier, *The Peacemaking Pastor*, 88.

[64] Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 11.

2. Opportunities to examine one's heart to determine a call to leadership. This training includes a spiritual gifts inventory, self-reflection, and activities designed for spiritual growth.

3. Studious examination of what the Bible says about conflict, including dissecting specific events and the steps or processes biblical personalities used to resolve conflict.

4. Fundamental management skills such as planning, organizing, delegating, problem-solving, administration, and budgeting.

5. Fundamental leadership skills such as inspiring a vision, serving others, ministry alignment, conflict resolution, building community, and holding others, themselves, and their ministry team accountable.

6. Mentoring and coaching from experienced, spiritually mature leaders will provide support and encouragement to new leaders.

7. Opportunities to build trust and develop relationships within a ministry context that will promote a healthy ministry, unity, and a sense of community within the church.[65]

Conclusion

Conflict is perceived by most to be a difficult topic to approach. Factors that affect conflict, be it a lack of agreement or inadequate leadership, can easily exacerbate conflict events. The sin of self-deception plays a critical role in why some conflicts linger and only appear to be resolved. Self-deception hinders spiritual transformation, which James says leads to the pursuit of selfish ambitions (Jas 4:3).

Transformation of the heart and mind to emulate Christ's example is essential to effective conflict resolution. True resolution only occurs when the parties involved are committed to Christ, have genuine love for their brothers and sisters, and view others as equal to themselves with respect to meeting needs, facing obstacles, and overcoming challenges. Leaders must examine themselves often and be willing to ask the Holy Spirit

[65] This list is based on a compilation of several sources on leadership including personal and professional experience, mentoring, and coaching of others, and the works of leading writers on leadership including, but not limited to, John Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012); Blanchard, Hodges, and Hendry, *Lead Like Jesus*; Sande, *The Peacemaker*; Arbinger Institute, *The Outward Mindset*; James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 5th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

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to examine them to reveal spiritual truths about their character and integrity. Only then can true transformation begin.

A genuine examination of one's heart and mind will produce transformation in leader effectiveness and spiritual growth. Leaders will begin to develop a primary skill set that includes growth and development in humility, compassion, love for others, and a dedication to peacemaking. A secondary skill set that includes verbal and non-verbal communication, negotiation, mediation, and process skills can then be taught to leaders. If conflict resolution skills are taught in this order, then leaders are better equipped to resolve conflict in a Godly manner because the focus is off self and on behaviors that honor God.

To help leaders grow in these areas, formal training in fundamental leadership skills is necessary and should be mandatory before assuming a leadership position. Leaders never stop needing to be discipled by wiser, more spiritually mature mentors, and a training program should include mentoring. Such initiatives enhance individuals' leadership capacity. In addition, the church will benefit from leaders who are better equipped to lead and manage conflict within their ministries.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter describes the project implementation by providing a description of the process used to fulfill the project goals. The purpose of this project was to develop a framework to understand the impact of unresolved conflict at the Consolidated Baptist Church, Lexington, Kentucky. The project had three goals: (1) assess leader comfort level with their ability to reconcile conflict in a ministry context; (2) develop a curriculum on biblical conflict resolution; and (3) modify leader comfort level with reconciling conflict in a ministry context. Implementation of the project began around May 1, 2022, and ended on July 14, 2022.

Project Preparation

The course for this project was titled "Leaders and Conflict: Strategies for Better Outcomes" and was developed between February 2022 and May 2022. It consisted of six classes, "Leaders and Conflict," "The Sin of Self-Deception," "Humility," "Compassion," "Love," and "Peacemaking." Each class was two hours in length and taught via Zoom.[1] The course was developed for current and future church leaders, with careful considerations given to adult learning principles[2] to enhance the learning experience, biblical faithfulness, and CBC culture. For consistency, each class followed a standard format that included a review of the previous week's learning, learning objectives for the current night's study, definition of the topic and its importance to conflict

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[1] CBC has not returned to live Bible study classes. All classes at the time of this writing are taught via Zoom.

[2] Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 7th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 156.

resolution, reflections on what the outside reading assignments offered to the participant, discussion on practical application of the topic relative to conflict resolution, and an analysis of a pericope related to the topic, which contained a conflict, and which could be dissected into a step-by-step process to help leaders address a specific type of conflict. The conflict types discussed in the course were internal, interpersonal, intergroup, intragroup, and organizational. Pre-class survey results were also considered during final edits of the course.

Promotion of this project began in May 2022. The congregation's pastor was included in all facets of the project for the past four years, and we had several conversations about the direction of the project prior to May 2022. He approved teaching this course to CBC leaders. An outline detailed every activity of the class and was given to an expert panel, who used an evaluation rubric to review the course.

A June 9, 2022, start date was selected and the pastor sent an e-mail to each leader personally inviting them to participate in this course. Seventy-six leaders (including approximately sixteen teachers) were invited. I sent three follow up e-mails encouraging participation. Initially, fourteen leaders registered for the course, and each submitted the Agreement to Participate form.[3] One registrant exited the course before it began, another failed to show for any of the courses, and another failed to submit the pre-class survey. Eleven participants completed the course. Most participants had to miss one or more Zoom classes, but the courses were recorded and sent to participants who had to miss class so they could watch it before the next class.

Implementation

This project was implemented with three goals in mind, which will be described in the next sections. The goals offered a framework in which to examine the impact CBC

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[3] See appendix 3.

conflict responsiveness has on the church and to identify key strategies that could be used to minimize unhealthy conflict resolution outcomes.

Goal 1 Results

The first goal was to assess leader comfort levels with their ability to reconcile conflict in a ministry context. A pre-course survey was administered to course participants.[4] The goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the participants completed the pre-course survey. A pre-course survey was sent to participants who registered for the course. The survey took approximately seven minutes and was divided into two sections. The first section was general information to establish their previous leadership experience and previously acquired training. Section 2 used a five-point Likert scale for which participants selected strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, or strongly agree. Eleven of twelve surveys were completed for a 91.67 percent completion rate. This goal was considered successful. Most participants, 81.9 percent felt they had received adequate training to effectively resolve conflicts. When asked if CBC had provided them adequate training in conflict, only two participants agreed.[5] A surprising 18.2 percent of respondents agreed that they have had adequate training in conflict resolution from CBC, while 54.5 percent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Three respondents, 27.3 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had had adequate training in conflict resolution at CBC. Most respondents, 63.6 percent believed unresolved conflict was a problem at CBC.

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[4] See appendix 1.

[5] CBC has offered no leadership training to its leaders since 2010.

Goal 2 Results

Goal 2 was to develop a curriculum on biblical conflict resolution. The goal was measured by an expert panel using an evaluation rubric[6] to evaluate the course. The rubric evaluated the areas of biblical faithfulness, relevancy, adherence to adult learning principles, clarity of purpose, theological trustworthiness and whether the lessons encouraged participants to explore their abilities to resolve conflict in a biblically faithful manner. The goal was measured using a rubric to assess biblical faithfulness, vision alignment, teaching methodology, and ease of duplication.[7] The goal was considered successfully met when there was a 90 percent adherence rate to all components of the rubric.

The expert panel consisted of five professionals: a church pastor with a MDiv and 27 years of pastoral experience, a Church Business Administrator with over 14 years of church administrator experience; a church pastor with a DMin and over 19 years of pastoral experience; a former church deacon with several years of church conflict experience, and a college administrator with a PhD in Counseling Psychology and approximately 30 years of counseling experience, some of which has been in the area of church related trauma.

The panel provided only positive comments about the course, indicating that it exceeded expectations and received a rating of "4" in all areas, for all criteria. The only concerns discussed with me were whether the material could be taught well in a two-hour timeframe because the content could have extended beyond two hours per class.[8] The feedback was noted, and slight changes were made to ensure the class could be taught in

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[6] See appendix 2.

[7] See appendix 2.

[8] The timing of this course was not a problem. A couple of the classes went beyond two hours due to student interest in the topic.

a two-hour timeframe. This goal was considered successful because it exceeded the 90 percent adherence rate to all components of the rubric.

Goal 3 Results

Goal 3 was to modify leader comfort levels with reconciling conflict in a ministry context. The goal was measured by comparing pre-course and post-course survey results using a t-test for dependent variables. The goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the scores.

The pre-course surveys were collected by the end of the first week of class, except for one participant who did not complete the survey. The post-course surveys were more difficult to collect, and two participants never submitted their surveys, nor did they indicate a reason why they chose not to take the final survey. This changed the sampling, which made analysis more difficult.

It should be noted, however, that some differences in individual scores suggest the course was beneficial (see table 1). Statement 1 indicated that participants felt they gained more training in biblically faithful conflict resolution than they had before the class. Statement 3 average score went down, most likely because participants realized they had not had sufficient training in resolving conflict in a biblically consistent manner.

Table 1. Survey averages

Survey Statements	Pre-course Survey Average	Post-course Survey Average	Change
1. From either a secular or Christian source, I have received adequate leadership training for my leadership role at CBC.	1.6	2.6	+1.0
2. CBC has provided me with adequate Christian leadership training.	2.6	2.9	+0.3
3. Through CBC, I have received training in how to resolve conflict in a biblically consistent manner.	3.2	2.4	-0.8
4. I could benefit from additional training on conflict resolution.	4.0	3.1	-0.9
5. Scripture provides clear instruction on resolving conflict.	4.9	4.7	-0.2
6. I seek guidance from the Bible when I am faced with a conflict situation.	3.9	4.1	+0.2
7. Leaders who are spiritually mature are better equipped to successfully resolve conflict than their less mature peers.	4.0	4.0	0.0
8. In the past, I have attempted to resolve conflict without Godly guidance.	3.7	3.7	0.0
9. When leading others, wanting my way sometimes causes me to respond poorly to conflict situations.	2.3	3.3	+1.0
10. I have personally been involved in an unresolved conflict at CBC.	3.3	3.8	+0.5
11. Unresolved conflict is a problem at CBC.	3.8	3.9	+0.1
12. Unresolved conflict is always sin.	3.2	3.1	-0.1
13. I trust my senior leadership.	3.8	3.4	-0.4
14. If leaders fail to address conflict, it affects my confidence in them.	3.9	4	+0.1
15. Those in my ministry trust me to address conflict.	3.7	3.8	+0.1
16. The ministry leader has a responsibility to facilitate conflict resolutions within their ministry.	4.4	4.4	0.0
17. I know whom at CBC can help me address conflicts.	3.9	3.7	-0.2
18. If the root issue of a problem remains unaddressed, it tends to resurface.	4.7	4.7	0.0
19. Most conflicts at CBC are resolved in a manner consistent with the teachings of the Bible.	2.7	3.0	+0.3
20. The presence of unresolved conflict in a church can cause the church to decline.	4.9	4.6	-0.3

Class Content

Each class was taught via Zoom and recorded for those who had to miss a class.[9] Each class had outside reading assignments of scriptures related to the class content. Participants were encouraged to use those scriptures as part of their daily devotions for the week, in hopes that they would not only read the scriptures, but would also, through prayer and reflection, meditate on the scriptures in a way that would allow the Holy Spirit to work in their lives.[10] Numerous Scriptures were used in the class as well, and participants were encouraged to use a study Bible because they tend to add contextual and cultural information, which were discussion points in the classes.

The course was designed to be self-reflective, and the focus was on the leader, not those with whom they may have had conflict. This was not the focus some were expecting, as one participant indicated during class 6. She asked if there would be specific tools taught to enhance their ability to resolve conflict. They were told that the research in the project revealed that those tools, that is, "I-statements," active listening, permission to share from their perspective, and the like, were great tools and could be taught in a follow-up class, but those tools were not the essential tools Christian leaders need. The skills Christian leaders need most are awareness of self, humility, compassion, love, and peacemaking. Without those skills, the other skills could be used to manipulate a conflict situation rather than resolve the conflict in a biblically faithful manner.

Class 1: Leaders and Conflict

After introductions and a brief overview of the research project, the class began with the question, "Why are you a leader?" That discussion included whether leadership was a calling or a skill they had learned; whether the ministry they were leading aligned

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[9] Class 4, "Compassion," was not recorded.

[10] Beyond discussion of the readings, there was no clear way to determine whether participants completed the outside readings. Several commented on the readings, but at least two indicated that they were behind on the assigned reading.

with their spiritual gifts and interests; and whether they thought they were good leaders. Most believed they were competent leaders because of their years of experience and training, mostly in the workplace. The discussion led to a couple of definitions of leadership from which we could segue into Matthew 20:25-28, which describes Jesus's view of kingdom focused leadership. He explained a different concept of leadership and told the disciples that if they wanted to be great, they had to be a servant to those they sought to lead. This was a contrast to how the Jewish religious leaders and Gentiles viewed leadership. A discussion ensued about the importance of Christian leaders having a posture of service toward those they lead. Joshua was a good example of a servant leader and as class participants read Joshua 1:7-9, they acknowledged courage as another attribute leaders need.

Using I Timothy 3:1-10, the discussion turned to other qualities leaders need to possess, and I then asked participants, "How are leaders chosen at CBC?" Discussion followed, indicating that there are no prescribed criteria for selecting leaders at CBC. After a brief discussion of how hard it can be to live up to the biblical leadership standards, participants discussed the question, "What conflicts have arisen for you as a ministry leader that may be attributed to your desire to adhere to the biblical standards for leadership?" The class was fully engaged and their comments inciteful.

After a short break, the class then turned the discussion to basic conflict definitions that would be used in the class. The next discussion question was, "Why is conflict so often viewed negatively?" Participants shared responses, which prompted information about the cost of unresolved conflict for churches. I shared some statistical data on church closings, and the pervasiveness of church decline, and then a discussion followed about the impact this has on individuals, communities, and the lost who may be seeking Christ.

The discussion then focused on conflict as a normal part of one's life that did not have to be viewed in a negative context. Most conflicts could be resolved, or at least

improved upon, when approached as a problem-solving opportunity rather than a personal battle. Five types of conflict—internal, interpersonal, intergroup, intragroup, and organizational—were examined to get participants to think about what types of unresolved conflicts were impacting CBC.

Following this discussion was a Bible study lesson on Scriptures that spoke to the root cause of conflict. Proverbs 6:16-19, Galatians 5:19-21, James 1:5-8, and James 4:1-12 revealed that the root causes of conflict lie in self-serving motives and ungodly attitudes. Instead of a negative approach to conflict, participants read Proverbs 2:1-12 and Galatians 5:22-26, which identify qualities and behaviors Christian leaders should demonstrate when resolving conflicts. There was one last discussion question, "What happens when conflict is not resolved in a biblically faithful manner?" A review of the key skills a leader needs to resolve conflict followed. The key learning points shared at the end of the class were: (1) leadership is a calling, not just an office; (2) leadership is also a teachable skill set; (3) Jesus emphasized servant leadership; (4) conflict resolution requires a spiritually mature skill set that includes awareness of oneself, humility, compassion, love, and a peacemaking heart; and (5) Christians must die daily to behaviors God hates and strive toward the fruit of the Spirit.

Class 2: The Sin of Self-Deception

Beginning with class 2, all classes began similarly with a review of the previous week followed by the learning objectives of the day's class. This class asked participants to explore their own propensity to see themselves in a distorted way that affects their interactions with others. A brief lecture on self-deception defined the concept and clarified why self-deception is sinful. Several scriptures were examined to support this behavior leading to sin, including Jeremiah 17:9-10, Galatians 6:3, Matthew 23:23-26, and several Proverbs. The common theme carried in these scriptures was that the heart is deceitful, and the way people view "right" may not be right in God's sight. Jesus frequently condemned the religious leaders for their deceit. For example, in Matthew 23, he described

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them as hypocrites, a brood of vipers, and people who were blind to their own sin. He further condemned them because their self-deception negatively impacted the people they were leading.

Next was a review of lessons learned from the assigned readings. Participants shared reflective moments and were reminded that the Lord examines the heart, mind, and motives. The next question for discussion was, "How do we get in a state of self-deception?" Participants next learned a theory researched by the Arbinger Institute that identifies a seven-step process for how self-deception occurs: (1) an act contrary to what I feel I should do for another is called an act of self-betrayal; (2) when I betray myself, I begin to see the world in a way that justifies my self-betrayal; (3) when I see the world in a self-justifying way, my view of reality becomes distorted; (4) when I betray myself, I enter a box, created by my own thoughts, feelings, and actions; (5) over time, certain boxes become characteristic of me, and I carry them with me. I see the whole world through the lens of my boxes; (6) by being in the box, I provoke others to be in the box; and (7) in the box, we invite mutual mistreatment and obtain mutual justification. We collude in giving each other reason to stay in the box.[11]

The Arbinger Institute's *Leadership and Self-Deception* suggests the way a person overcomes self-deceptive practices is to question one's virtue.[12] References to supporting scriptures (Ps 26:2-3, 51:10; 139:23-24) advises Christians to request God's help and guidance frequently to minimize the negative influence self-deception may have on one's interactions with others. Self-deception has a significant impact on one's ability to navigate conflict.

This class offered the first opportunity to analyze a pericope to dissect the step-by-step processes present in a biblical conflict. The study was an internal conflict involving

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[11] Arbinger Institute, *Leadership and Self-Deception* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2018), 105.

[12] Arbinger Institute, *Leadership and Self-Deception*, 147.

David from 2 Samuel 11-12:1-25. In this scripture one sees the impact an internal conflict has on a leader's effectiveness. The participants appeared to have some difficulty viewing this passage from a process perspective, and I may not have sufficiently explained their assignment in a way that was easily understood. However, after the participants were shown the steps, they reviewed the Scripture again, looking for those steps David used to release his internal conflict. I revised the future classes to more of a guided examination of the pericope, considering the difficulty with the first conflict analysis. As a result of the revisions, the remaining exercises were also easier to teach. The class ended with participants sharing their reflections on the process, and a review of the key learning points: (1) Jesus strongly cautioned leaders to be aware of self-deception because self-deception can destroy leader effectiveness; (2) internal conflict is often a spiritual crisis; (3) internal conflict often leads to other types of conflict; (4) sometimes internal conflict requires outside interventions; and (5) all conflict types will require submission, confession, repentance, forgiveness, grace, and reconciliation to be resolved. The last learning point was included in all future classes because it represents an overarching theme for all conflict resolution, regardless of type.

Class 3: Humility

Jesus is the greatest example of humility in the Bible. Jesus became man for us so that we could be saved from eternal death. He humbly submitted to the will of his heavenly father despite his sinless perfection.[13] All participants agreed that humility is a struggle, particularly for those who have been in leadership positions in various types of organizations or ministries for a few years. Next was an exercise where participants identified an area of personal expertise in which they struggled to maintain a humble posture. Participants told the group what triggered them to know they were moving away

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[13] John 3:1-21, John 14, John 17, Matt 26:36-46, and Phil 2:5-11 are examples of Jesus demonstrating humility.

from humility with respect to that personal expertise, and what triggers they used to remain humble with respect to that personal expertise skill. Reflections on the outside readings revealed the Bible has much to say about humility. An exercise using Romans 12:3 was next and described the impact prideful leaders have on their ministry and the church.

The conflict analysis scripture on humility was Genesis 13, specifically Abram's humble stance in contrast to Lot's lack of humility. Based on what I learned from the first class, I revised the teaching methodology by reading and teaching Genesis 13, sharing the steps used to resolve the conflict first, then reviewing the scripture with participants identifying where those steps happened in the narrative. It was much more effective, and the participants appeared to better understand the analysis. The class ended with key learning points: (1) leaders must develop genuine humility as a tool for resolving conflict; (2) leaders struggle to maintain genuine humility; (3) humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking less about yourself;[14] (4) humility is a hallmark of Christian conduct, and (5) Jesus was the greatest example of humility in the New Testament.

Class 4: Compassion

The easiest definition of compassion is empathy plus action. Jesus demonstrated compassion for others in difficult circumstances, sickness, sinful behavior, and forgiveness.[15] In this class, after the preliminary review and learning objectives, participants were asked to share their reflections from the outside readings. Next, we began a study of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which is one of the best examples of Jesus's teaching on compassion. A Bible study of this passage was done to make sure everyone had a similar understanding of the major themes. Participants returned to this

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[14] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here for?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 148.

[15] Luke 7 demonstrates Jesus's compassion in multiple scenarios in which people come to him for help.

parable, but this time to analyze the types of conflict present. Discussion of those conflict types and how they presented in this narrative showed that this parable contains internal, interpersonal, intergroup, and intragroup conflicts. One of the learning points was that some conflicts have multiple layers of conflict that need to be explored and addressed. Further discussion revealed CBC often faces multilevel conflicts that do not surface, and therefore do not get resolved.

After the steps in the conflict were identified, the conversation shifted to a comparison between this parable and what is happening in the Lexington, Kentucky community. There are multiple levels of community conflict for which CBC, as a member of the community, attempts to seek solutions. Examples of these conflicts include diverse perspectives and solutions for the increase in violent crimes, homelessness, and food insecurity. The next two questions, "What does God require from the church with respect to showing compassion to others in their local communities?" and, "What are the consequences when the church has not demonstrated genuine compassion toward others?" produced rewarding conversations that served as a reminder to CBC that they have a responsibility to honor God through compassion to those around them, both saved and unsaved. While CBC is a genuinely compassionate and generous church, and has influence in the Lexington community, the final discussion question was, "Is CBC doing all it can do for the community?" The class ended with a review of the key learning points: (1) real compassion compels us to action and mercy; (2) the Lord's compassion never ends; (3) opposing perspectives on compassion are common in the church; and (4) the church should emulate Christ's examples of compassion.

Class 5: Love

The focus of class 5 was agape love, and specifically, the love shown within the local church. God is love and Jesus said Christians are known by the love we show other people (John 13:34-35; 15:9-17). A short video provided an explanation of this love. Using 1 Corinthians 12-14 as the scriptural reference, participants reflected first on

why agape love can be so difficult to demonstrate in the local church. A careful study of these chapters identified some serious conflicts within the Corinthian church and a discussion among participants confirmed similarities to the modern church. Participants were charged to love in ways that decrease conflict in the church.

The conflict analysis was broader in scope and incorporated the apostle Paul's stern directives to the Corinthian church regarding their behavior toward one another. This class produced generous and productive discussion. A loving church produces godly fruit. This lesson was a good reminder that agape love can only thrive when Christians ask the Holy Spirit to produce godly fruit within them. The key learning points from this class included (1) God is Love; (2) God requires us to love others as He loves us; (3) Agape love is impossible without the Holy Spirit; (4) Love covers a multitude of sins and promotes grace; (5) God's love for us is unconditional; and (6) Christians must choose to love unconditionally to follow Christ's example.

Class 6: Peacemaking

Class 6 was the culmination of the five previous classes' content because those attributes allow one to be a genuine peacemaker. Peace, in this context, is found in a relationship with Jesus.[16] After reviewing and reflecting on what the Bible reveals about peacemaking, participants were given an activity to examine how they handle conflicts. I asked participants to remember a conflict in which they had a fixed position that they believed was right and the other party was wrong. Then I asked them to reflect on their behavior in the conflict as if they had no knowledge of Christ and if there was a difference in how they would respond to the conflict. Several said there was no difference. Ken Sande says when faced with a conflict in which Christians use Scripture to attempt to prove their point, they will almost always resort to legalism and rarely reference the gospel. He

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[16] First Thess 5:11-28, John 14:27, and John 16:33 affirm Jesus's mission to bring peace to those who follow him.

teaches that to be a true peacemaker when resolving a conflict, one must view the conflict through the lens of the gospel rather than the law.[17] This was a profound concept for those present, and it was difficult to explain because people naturally espouse a fixed position in a conflict situation. That led to a discussion on the ways in which Jesus expresses his love, which leads to peace with God if Christians allow the Holy Spirit to transform their heart and mind. The next questions were difficult to answer for participants—If God showers us daily with his love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion, then why can we not do that for one another? Also, how can one resolve a conflict in a biblically faithful manner unless one approaches the conflict through the lens of the gospel? While leaders from all backgrounds solve problems every day, Christian leaders must always be open to reconciliation with others.

The next part of class responded to the statement, "All peace is not peace." Using definitions for peace breaking and peace faking concepts from Sande, participants could see how damaging disingenuous interaction can be in the church. Throughout the class participants were asked to reflect on their own peacemaking skills within the context of peace breaking, peace faking, and peacemaking. Several discovered that they had, at times, avoided a conflict because it seemed insurmountable, or became aggressive during a conflict because they were not getting their needs met.

The class was filled with lively discussion about this topic, which led to the conclusion that conflicts must be addressed in a biblically faithful manner. Avoidance is not the best solution long term, although it may have short term benefits if the parties have reached an impasse or are unable to communicate civilly. Aggressive attainment of one's way is not effective either. True communication infused with grace, mercy, humility, and compassion are far more excellent strategies for true reconciliation and peace.

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[17] Ken Sande, "Gospel-Driven Peacemaking," YouTube, October 7, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHUjCLrA300.

The conflict analysis segment examined another multi-level conflict in Acts 15. The main emphasis in this passage is the organizational conflict and how it impacts the church. After dissecting this passage into types of conflict, the step-by-step process was described. As I shared the process, a discussion began on how conflict can be resolved when viewed as a problem-solving opportunity. In Acts 15, once the parties' positions were voiced, James developed a compromise that honored God and solved the problem. Unlike most would choose to believe, this conflict was not without heated debate, which is normal when there are multiple fixed positions, but in the end, the parties agreed to the compromise and were united again in spreading the gospel. After this return to unity, a conflict between Paul and Barnabas over whether to take John Mark on the next missionary journey became so heated that they separated and took other partners to share the gospel. Even amid the conflict, God still allowed the gospel to spread because that separation caused the gospel to spread even more rapidly. The parties eventually reconciled and continued working together. A review of the Paul and Barnabas conflict demonstrated that leaders can have serious conflicts among them, but they can be resolved and all parties should be open to reconciliation as members of the family of God. Reflective time followed for the participants to evaluate how they tend to approach conflict. Key learning points for this class were, (1) peacemaking requires spiritual maturity and wisdom; 2) God requires us to make peace whenever possible; (3) we can only live in peace with each other and God through the power of the Holy Spirit; (4) wicked people cannot find genuine peace; (5) peace faking and peace breaking are destructive forces in the church; (6) real peacemaking involves reconciliation and forgiveness between conflicted persons and God; (7) peacemaking is a choice; and (8) only a relationship with Jesus can direct our hearts toward lasting peace.

After the class concluded, the post-class survey was sent to participants. Eleven surveys were sent and nine were submitted. Three additional e-mails and four additional texts were sent attempting to secure the other two surveys. Because two of the

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surveys were not submitted, they were removed from the paired *t*-test results. Data was analyzed using surveys from nine class participants who completed the course.

Conclusion

The course, "Leaders and Conflict: Strategies for Better Outcomes," was designed to remind leaders that conflict is inevitable but resolvable when approached as a problem-solving opportunity. The course helped participants reflect on their own behaviors and identify areas for improvement. Regardless of skill level, Christians must continue to grow in conflict resolution effectiveness, especially if they seek a ministry leadership position. How leaders view themselves determines how they respond to life situations. If they deceive themselves into believing they are to be valued but fail to extend that sense of value to others, then they will exhibit spiritual immaturity that may render them unable to resolve a conflict in a way that honors God and allows for reconciliation between them and the other party. Intentional consideration of the concepts in the course will yield spiritual growth and more effective strategies for navigating conflict events.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to develop a framework to understand the impact of unresolved conflict at the Consolidated Baptist Church, Lexington, Kentucky. Understanding unresolved conflict at CBC is important for two reasons. First, unresolved conflict increases conflict within the church. Stephen Macchia calls unresolved conflict a cancer in a congregation.[1] Whether it spreads slowly and consistently, or is fiercely aggressive, the damage can be irreconcilable if not addressed. This chapter will explore what I learned about the impact of unresolved conflict, based on data received from the *t*-test performed on the pre- and post-surveys, as well as data from individual survey questions, that suggest unresolved conflict is a problem at CBC. To do that I will evaluate the project's purpose and goals, discuss the project's strengths and weaknesses, consider what I would do differently if I were to do the project again, review from a theological perspective what I learned about God, his church, his Word, and so forth, and what I learned about myself as a Christian and a leader.

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a framework to understand the impact of unresolved conflict at the Consolidated Baptist Church, Lexington, Kentucky. The purpose of this project was birthed from a concern that unresolved conflicts might be having an impact on the ability of CBC to fully carry out its mission due to conflict among leaders and systems in the church. Some conflicts have been difficult to resolve perhaps

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[1] Stephen Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Lexington, MA: Leadership Transformations, 2013), 106.

because spiritual immaturity and selfish ambitions cloud godly pursuits of unity and clarity of purpose. Understanding the complexities of unresolved conflict proved to be broader than the scope of this project. Factors that are likely to be contributing to unresolved conflict must be given further consideration if an effective model for conflict resolution is to be implemented.

The purpose of this project aligned with the exegesis of Proverbs 2:1-15, which implores Christians to intentionally pursue godly wisdom and spiritual maturity. Second, the purpose aligns with the exegesis of Proverbs 6:12-19, which identifies ungodly behaviors that lead to conflict. Third, the purpose aligns with the exegesis of James 3:1-11 and James 4:1-12 by further exploring the roots of conflict while offering effective conflict resolution strategies.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

Churches decline when they are unable to resolve conflicts in a biblically faithful way. Before one can resolve a problem, one must investigate two factors. First, is there a problem to be addressed, in this case, unresolved conflict? Second, if there is a problem with unresolved conflict, what impact does it have on the church's ability to carry out the Great Commission? This project explores these questions through positive attainment of three goals, along with the classroom experience and feedback from participants.

The teaching experience suggested the participants had varying levels of comfort in responding to conflict. As would be expected, those who had been in ministry leadership for six years or more were much more comfortable resolving conflict than those who had less experience. In the pre-course survey, 88.8 percent indicated that they had more than six years of ministry leadership experience at CBC and elsewhere. When asked if they had had to resolve a conflict at CBC, the pre-course survey indicated approximately 91 percent had had to resolve a conflict at CBC, but the post-course survey indicated 100 percent of respondents had had to resolve a conflict at CBC. Further analysis of the goals adds clarity to the need for leadership training at CBC.

Goal 1

    The first goal was to assess leader comfort with their ability to reconcile conflict in a ministry context. This goal was successfully met when 91 percent of the participants completed the pre-course survey. The information received from the survey was enlightening, especially when compared to the post-course survey. Leaders who completed the course had significant leadership experience, and all participants indicated they could respond appropriately in a conflict situation. Through the classroom experience, participants identified at least one area of struggle in which additional training would be beneficial. When asked to respond to the statement, "I could benefit from additional training on conflict resolution," 66.67 percent replied agree or strongly agree, with 33.33 percent responding neither agree nor disagree on the pre-course survey. The post-course survey results changed with 55.5 percent of the respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing while 44.4 percent indicated they disagree or strongly disagree that they needed additional training on conflict resolution.

Goal 2

    The second goal was to develop a curriculum on biblical conflict resolution. Since I was doing this for my church, I wanted something impactful but not adversarial or offensive to the church leaders. I had planned to teach a course that would include commonly used tools to enhance communication skills and tie them into conflict situations. It seemed like a safe approach that could provide some benefit to leaders. My research, however, revealed the need for a different approach to conflict resolution. True conflict resolution cannot begin externally; it must begin internally. The heart can be deceitful, and the mind can get distorted when one seeks one's own desires (Ps 139:23-24; Prov 16:25; Jer 17:9-10; Matt 15:7-11; 23:23-26). James says conflicts arise because of selfish ambitions (Jas 4:1-12). If one is to approach conflict with a godly posture, then one must examine the heart and mind first. To do this, one must give careful attention to behaviors and motives with respect to humility, compassion, agape love, and the desire to

live at peace with all people. If any of those attributes are lacking, then the door is opened to selfish ambitions, which makes true conflict resolution difficult. Constant attention to these areas reminded the participants that they control their role in the conflict situation.

The course offered Scripture related to conflict and the attributes that contribute to success. The objective was for the reflective time to allow participants to gain insight into their true conflict resolution abilities and where they needed to hone existing skills. Based on the feedback received during the course and changes between the pre- and post-results, this was accomplished. For example, one survey statement was, "I seek guidance from the Bible when I am faced with a conflict situation." In the pre-course survey, 77.8 percent responded agree or strongly agree (most responded with agree), and 22.2 percent responded neither agree nor disagree. In the post-course survey, the percentages decreased, with 66.67 percent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they seek guidance from the Bible when faced with a conflict situation and 33.33 percent responded neither agree nor disagree. One would expect the affirmative responses to rise, but if one gave careful reflection on actual behavior, it would not be surprising to see this number fall. People often deceive themselves into believing they are more faithful than they really are to the tenets of Scripture.

Another notable difference in responses is found in the statement, "When leading others, wanting my way sometimes causes me to respond poorly to conflict situations." In the pre-course survey, only 33.3 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, with 66.7 percent responding disagree or disagree strongly. In the post-course survey, 66.7 percent responded agree or strongly agree with this statement, while only 33.3 percent responded disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. This is significant because people often fail to see the impact their fixed positions have on their ability to resolve a conflict. The initial feedback from this class suggested it was impactful and successful because it forced leaders to think and reflect on their behavior. It also

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identified areas to hone to become more effective in resolving conflict in a biblically faithful manner.

Goal 3

The third goal was to modify leader comfort level with reconciling conflict in a ministry context. This goal was important because when leaders can get comfortable in a conflict situation, they are less likely to mishandle the conflict. When leaders develop the habit of taking a godly posture rather than an avoidant or aggressive posture, problems can be solved easier and with less animosity.

A *t*-test for dependent variables revealed no significant difference in leader comfort with conflict after the training. Observations about the test results show less than a one-point difference between surveys (see table 2).

Table 2. *T*-test: Paired two sample for means

	Pre-test TOTAL	*Post-test TOTAL*
Mean	72.33333333	73.11111111
Variance	9	24.86111111
Observations	9	9
Pearson Correlation	0.490252598	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	8	
t Stat	-0.5325851	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.304395715	
t Critical one-tail	1.859548038	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.60879143	
t Critical two-tail	2.306004135	

Reasons for no statistical difference appear to lie in the fact that while six respondent post-course scores rose from the pre-course survey, three respondent post-course scores were lower (see table 3). The mean score rose slightly from 72.333 to 73.111. The *t*-stat value of 0.533 was larger than the critical one-tail test, 0.304, but smaller than the *t*-critical two-tail test at 2.306

Table 3. Participant overall scores

Participant Overall Scores			
Participant	Pre-Course Survey Scores	Post-Course Survey Scores	Total Difference
1	76	78	2
2	67	64	-3
3	71	75	4
4	69	77	8
5	72	68	-4
6	75	69	-6
7	74	77	3
8	72	73	1
9	75	77	2

Speculative reasoning regarding the data suggests several considerations. First, participants may not have been as forthcoming in the pre-course test. Trust was built during the six-week course and perhaps participants felt more comfortable sharing honest

answers. A second reason for the disparity may lie in participants who felt they were better at resolving conflict than they were when they completed the pre-course survey but changed their position considering the course content. A third reason could be that some participants became more aware of the presence of negative conflict at CBC. Perhaps they could not see unresolved conflict as an issue before they took the class. A fourth option could be that the course content did not enhance existing skills.[2] The most likely reason is the low number of participants skewed the results of the research.

Strengths of the Project

This project had several strengths. First, the course was well developed. The curriculum was robust and adhered to adult learning principles. Consideration was also given to creating a course that appealed to all learning and thinking styles by incorporating auditory, visual, read and write, critical thinking, and kinesthetic learning. The course content lent itself well to effective scaffolding of biblical principles, with careful consideration to exegetical integrity. Each class built on the previous class, culminating in peacemaking, which requires all other skills previously learned.

A second strength was biblical faithfulness. The course placed high value on reading Scripture, with applicable contextual and cultural considerations. Outside and in class readings represented an appropriate level of academic rigor without being overly scholarly. The outside readings of topical scripture allowed participants to meditate on the class topics for the entire six-week period. Participants had the opportunity to immerse themselves in biblical Scripture related to self-deception, humility, compassion, agape love, and peacemaking.

Another strength of the course was having an opportunity to view familiar pericopes from a different perspective. No one in the class indicated that they had ever

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[2] Four participants told me the course content was valuable and caused them to recognize the need to change their behavior in conflict situations.

dissected conflicts found in Scripture into workable processes. They were provided with step-by-step processes discussed in class to keep for future use.

The next strength of the course is its generalizability to other settings outside the church. The leadership principles taught in this class are relevant to business and other secular entities and would be easily adapted to a secular setting. Most of the sources, outside the Bible, were from leadership experts who engage scholarship in both secular and sacred spaces. Such experts include John Maxwell, Ken Blanchard, Rick Warren, and Ken Sande. These and other authors, who write and research dually, translate biblical principles into business and non-profit language, but the principles are indistinguishable.

Class participation was another strength of the project. Each week provided lively discussion of thought-provoking questions and concepts. Participants were always respectful and listened attentively to each other. Most participants had a genuine desire to improve their conflict resolution skills and be a better leader at CBC. The format also enhanced the class. The ability to take a class from one's comfortable place is valuable to most people. Although post pandemic protocols required an online class, the medium lent itself well to Bible study classes. This course did not use social media platforms as an alternative delivery medium, but the course is easily adapted to those platforms and could reach a greater audience.

The last strength of this course was that it lays a foundation for future work at CBC in conflict resolution. There are opportunities for additional training, Bible studies, and mediation of conflicts between individuals and ministry teams. Conflict reconcilers are needed in most churches and CBC is no exception. Based on this research, a Conflict Reconciliation ministry comprised of trained conflict reconcilers could greatly benefit this church. If people would use those services, unresolved conflicts would decrease significantly.

Weaknesses of the Project

There were several weaknesses and limitations in this study. All other Bible studies at CBC are one hour in length. This course was two hours long and lasted for six weeks. The extra length deterred at least one person in a senior leadership position from attending the class, and there may have been others. Length and duration of the class made this course vulnerable to attrition and disengagement. This weakness resulted in the next weakness, leader participation.

Seventy-six leaders were invited to participate in the course. I hoped to have 20-25 participants in class. A few people informed me that they were unable to participate in the class because they had other activities planned. Approximately forty-five leaders failed to respond to the invitation to participate. Fourteen originally registered for the course, with one dropping the course before it began, and another failing to participate in any of the classes. Twelve participants attended the class, eleven completed the pre-course survey and only nine completed the post-course survey. The small sampling size made it difficult to assert generalizations about the research study. The sampling represented approximately 11 percent of the eligible participants, so for a significant segment of the CBC leadership population, assessment of their comfort with or ability to resolve conflict could not be evaluated. As a result of the mixed responses from the nine participants, the study was statistically insignificant.

The low participation rate was disappointing and warranted serious contemplation. It did not appear to be a personal affront because low participation rates among ministry leaders are a problem at CBC. Low participation was likely caused by a lack of interest in professional development, prior commitments, reluctance to address conflict, misunderstanding of leader roles and responsibilities, and inadequate accountability strategies. Further investigation is needed to determine the actual root causes of leader disengagement. Once the root causes are identified, strategies to increase leader engagement can be implemented. Perhaps calling each leader personally to invite

them to participate would have yielded more participants. I erroneously thought a sincere pastoral request was sufficient to garner participation from most leaders.

Another weakness that was also a strength was the online format. Training and education in all arenas have trended toward alternative delivery methods and participant convenience. While recording the class in a way that could be emailed to participants offered convenience and ease of use, it also offered too much flexibility and was susceptible to distractions. Further, the ability to view the classes if the participants missed a class seemed to offer permission to miss the live Zoom experience because they could watch the class at another time. This created fluctuations in attendance that could have been prevented.

Lastly, participants did not get to delve into CBC conflicts. As the class explored biblical conflicts and their solutions, there was no time for practical application of the concepts to any conflicts they were having in their ministries. As a result, it was impossible to determine the true effectiveness of the content because participants could not practice the skills in a controlled environment.

What I Would Do Differently

No plan is without flaws. This project is no exception. There are several things I would do differently if I could do this over again. First, because the sample size was so small, I would offer the class twice a week to accommodate more participants. This change would offer two options for taking the course, and participants could take either session that week. In addition, I would offer the class at the beginning of a new year. January is the perfect time of year to review New Year's resolutions and reflect on personal goals. This course lends itself well to self-reflection and might pique greater interest at the beginning of the year.

The format of the class, two hours per night for six weeks, was problematic. The typical Bible study format at CBC is one hour. It could be prudent to adjust the class to fit into the expected timeframe. The content is worth two hours of participants' time,

but because the expected time is one hour, the class could be shortened to one hour for six weeks or extended to twelve weeks, one hour per week. Our Sunday school series covers a three-month period. It would be easier to adapt the class into this timeframe because participants are used to studying a concept for three months, it would require less overall editing, and it would allow the class to be expanded to include current conflict cases brought to the class by the participants.

Another piece that was missing from this course was the opportunity to use the skills outside the classroom. There was no way to test learner knowledge. It would have been more helpful to have the students identify an existing conflict for which they could develop and implement a conflict resolution plan. They could report their results in a safe classroom environment where everyone could practice providing Christ-like constructive feedback. To complement this course and continue training in this topic, a sequel course could be developed to allow participants to develop and implement a conflict resolution plan to incorporate this course content and add technical tools to improve their communication during actual conflict situations.

Finally, in the survey, I would add the following statement, "I feel comfortable resolving conflict in a ministry setting." If I had added this question, I would have been able to determine whether participants felt their comfort level with conflict resolution improved.

Theological Reflections

The book of James offers much to consider on the topic of conflict. Its practical application and admonishment should give Christians pause for self-reflection. James calls Christians to evaluate their spiritual maturity (1:5-8, 19-27; 2; 3; 4:1-12; 5:16). This project asked leaders to pause for self-reflection on how they handled conflict in a ministry setting. By default, leaders were encouraged to evaluate their spiritual maturity. I too was challenged to reflect on my behavior in conflict situations and my spiritual maturity. I have read the Bible for decades, but until I studied what the Bible had to say about conflict, I

did not realize most of the Bible is about conflict. I rarely considered the conflicts presented in the Scripture passages I read. As a result, resolving conflict in a godly manner is so much harder to do that I first thought. To honor God in a conflict situation means to completely die to selfish ambitions in a way that may cause us to abandon our position in the conflict (Prov 16:2). That is not to say that we should not seek what is right, but who is right? I have learned that I should always seek right according to what is right in God's sight, not my sight (Prov 3:5-8). We can become blinded by our own perspective and that blindness leads to self-deception. We think our position is right and we can often use Scripture to support it. Self-deception, however, leads to sins of the flesh, succinctly listed by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:19-21. Hatred, strife, jealousy, angry outbursts, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, and envy happen in churches every day, including CBC, and are often fostered by church leaders. Using this backdrop, this project taught me other truths about sin, conflict, leaders, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

First, the inspired Word of God provides much information and instruction on behaviors that lead to conflict. Scripture overflows with warnings about the dangers of pride and arrogance, the consequences of failing to be compassionate, and the importance of building a local church community of people filled with agape love toward each other (Prov 6:16-19; 1 Cor 12-14). I did not see the value of the church as community until I spent this time in seminary. My perspective is forever changed about God's desire for us to build his kingdom together. The church cannot have impact in the local community until it has impact inside the walls of the local church. When unsaved persons hear about poor conflict reconciliation inside the church, how will they ever see a God of restoration and reconciliation? We as the body of Christ send poor messages to the world we are trying to lead to a salvific relationship with Jesus Christ. Our spiritual immaturity stunts our effectiveness (1 Cor 3:1-9; Heb 5:11-14; 1 Pet 1:13-16). I used to take a harsh stance on the blatant hypocrisy the church shows to the world, until I realized my hypocrisy shows too. God requires his church to show amazing demonstrations of grace and mercy. We have

failed to provide that for those who see us as "the church." This time of reflection has caused me to repent repeatedly because God has allowed me to see my shortcomings.

The passages exegeted in chapter 2, Proverbs 2:1-15, 6:12-19, James 3:1-13, and 4:1-12, implore Christians to intentionally seek wisdom that leads to spiritual maturity. The sin of self-deception often blinds Christians to their own immaturity, so when such a person seeks a leadership position, they will do so believing they are spiritually mature enough to perform the responsibilities of that leadership position in a godly manner. Only through the work of the Holy Spirit do we see our own depravity, and Christian leaders sometimes fail to acknowledge the Holy Spirit's revelation of their behavior. This project was particularly important to spotlight the importance of selecting spiritually mature leaders who seek guidance from the Holy Spirit when faced with a conflict event.

The Bible provides outstanding leadership training and guidance. Unfortunately, church leaders are often the last to grasp this wealth of information. Secular leaders consume biblical leadership practices, often using terms like benchmarks or best practices. They are not marketed as "Bible-based leadership training" but the source of the best practices in contemporary leadership is the Bible. I used to be confounded by this missed opportunity, but leading ministry can be harder than leading in the secular world for a couple of reasons. First, church leaders often fail to seek the Bible for specific guidance on leadership. This may be because they are trying to adopt a Christ-like lifestyle and they believe their transformed behavior will cover anything they will need to do. While that is true, in theory, an intentional study of what the Bible has to say about leadership will produce more abundant fruit and decrease conflict in a ministry setting. Christians often believe that avoiding a conflict, or simply praying about it, will solve the problem. That is mostly untrue.

In studying God's Word regarding leadership, confronting conflict with grace, mercy, and in a posture of genuine peacemaking, for the purpose of unity, is the standard God requires (Matt 5:9; Eph 4:1-7; Rom 12:18). In Genesis 13, Abram and Lot faced a

conflict that impacted their business, family, and relationship with God. Abram allowed God to lead him to the appropriate action needed to resolve the conflict. He did not avoid the conflict. Leaders are sometimes unable to resolve a conflict because they do not want to give up their fixed position. Abram could have done likewise because he was the patriarch of the family and Lot would have had to abide by his decision. By Abram allowing Lot to choose the parcel of land he wanted, he chose to honor God by keeping unity between himself and Lot. He made a choice to resolve the conflict and please God rather than "get his way." It is harder for leaders to move from their fixed position, especially when they believe they can support their position with Scripture.

I have learned that conflicts must be viewed through the lens of the gospel. By doing that, leader posture changes from a fixed position to one of servitude, grace, mercy, compassion, love, and peacemaking. One must remember that they were in conflict with God, and he showed love and grace toward them that is way beyond comprehension. In the same way, we are to approach a conflict with the same grace that has been extended to us. We should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and quick to extend forgiveness, love, and reconciliation. Ephesians 6:12 says we are not in conflict with that person in front of us, but with the evil forces in the heavens. If one approaches conflict with this spiritual clarity, it creates unity in the church and harmony with others. We become peacemakers.

Second, leaders need ongoing training. Jesus trained his disciples for three years. The Holy Spirit is given to continually guide believers toward godly behavior. Prayer, studying the Bible, and training create leaders who produce unity in the church. The Christian maturity model of intentionally seeking knowledge and wisdom serves as an appropriate platform to support the value of continuous leadership training in a church setting. To that end, a leadership academy will be developed and implemented beginning in early 2023. The training will include Baptist doctrine, leadership skills building, leader responsibilities and expectations, and ministry goal setting, strategic alignment, and accountability.

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Personal Reflections

Seminary has been a life changing experience for me personally and professionally. The Holy Spirit has been patient and merciful with me on this journey. He has provided guidance and direction. He worked every class, assignment, and project together for my good. Sinful areas of my life that negatively impact my ability to minister have been identified and are being addressed. Addressing those issues has given me laser focused direction on my purpose in the body of Christ. This section will address four areas that taught me the most about myself and my God-given purpose.

First, I try every day to let the Holy Spirit lead my way. A project on conflict would never have been my plan. The Scriptures I used for this project at first seemed odd to me because other Scriptures were more often used to describe concepts in my project. In my exegesis of Proverbs 2:1-15 and Proverbs 6:12-19, I learned that spiritual maturity would be the byproduct of my work. I would become spiritually mature and gain wisdom if I faithfully attended church, participated in ministry, studied the Bible, and prayed daily. While those tasks are helpful, Proverbs 2 says I am called to intentionally pursue wisdom, which I had not been doing. We are to ask God for wisdom rather than assume it will come if we open our Bibles. Once I started asking for spiritual maturity and wisdom, my eyes were opened to many things I had overlooked. I have grown significantly in wisdom as compared to four years ago.

Second, one area of significant spiritual growth lies in acknowledging that I have conducted myself poorly in many conflict situations. This has perhaps been my most humbling realization. I have honed the technical skill set to effectively resolve conflicts, but I have been guilty of having self-serving motives, lacking patience, and pushing my own agenda under the guise of conflict resolution. I have failed to extend grace, mercy, compassion, love, or humility. Peacemaking is not always a thought in my head, even now. I struggle to maintain a godly posture when faced with a conflict situation. I thought because I had strong skills and ample tools and techniques to resolve

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conflicts, that I was good at conflict resolution. But, when I consider my heart posture, which this project forced me to examine, I realized I needed spiritual growth in this area.

Third, paradoxically, I have also learned that my skills in strategic initiatives and conflict resolution are a valuable contribution to my church and other churches. The Holy Spirit showed me that the skill set I tend to subvert is where my purpose lies. When taking spiritual gifts assessments, leadership is consistently revealed as one of my primary gifts. I shun this gift because I do not like being in leadership positions. This program of study has shown me that God has gifted me because leadership is needed in the church. Instead of ignoring this gift that includes strategic thinking and development, problem solving, and conflict resolution, I need to humbly submit to God's purpose for my life, embrace this gift, and use it in my church.

Lastly, teaching is my first love and is usually my top spiritual gift in spiritual gift assessments. I am a teacher. This program has expanded my vision from teaching a class, to a greater focus on churchwide Christian education and its impact on discipleship. There is no greater responsibility, outside of preaching, than teaching God's Word to God's people. Teachers have a responsibility to study, provide well prepared lessons, and provide classes that teach theology and doctrine, but that also teach practical application for daily living. I would love to see class offerings at CBC expand to include topic studies, theology, and leadership training. Our church would be blessed by well planned and executed Christian education, and I know I have a role in that endeavor. One of those roles will be to lead a team who will develop, implement, and oversee leader training. This will be a daunting task, but the benefits could add tremendously to the overall health of CBC. CBC has a significant talent capacity that is currently underutilized. This project should engage not only current and future leaders, but church members who may not be currently involved in ministry.

I am thankful for this seminary experience. I have been humbled and challenged throughout the DMin program, for which I feel blessed beyond measure. My prayer is that my experience and the work I do in the future honors God and builds his kingdom.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to develop a framework in which to understand the impact of unresolved conflict at the Consolidated Baptist Church in Lexington, Kentucky. This project was successful overall because two of the three goals were met, but more importantly, leadership at CBC is evaluating the impact of unresolved church conflict on church health. Problems exist, but so do solutions. Feedback from leaders indicate that a course on conflict resolution was needed in the church, and those who attended took the time to self-reflect on the course content and their role in addressing unresolved conflict. They will be better leaders for their efforts. Leadership at CBC is united in their desire to see a thriving church that impacts the local community.

For CBC to minimize the negative impact of unresolved conflict, several initiatives need to be implemented. First, a specific set of criteria needs to be established for screening persons for leadership. The criteria need to include biblical mandates and practical behavioral expectations. These criteria need to be applied to everyone being considered for a leadership role, with specific criterion added to assess fitness for the specific ministry they seek to lead.

Once leaders are selected at CBC, they need to be trained and mentored by seasoned, mature leaders. Ideally, training should start before they become leaders. Specifics of what should be included in a leader training curriculum is outlined in chapter 3. Initial training should be followed by Christian leader development to augment previous training. Mentoring is critical not only for leaders but for Christians in general. A mentor relationship invites spiritual growth and Christian maturity, characteristics leaders must have.

Intentional effort should be put forth to identify and attempt to resolve any current unresolved conflicts in which CBC leaders are involved. This will require full transparency from leaders and congregants, and grace, mercy, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. It will also require conflict participants to self-reflect on their role in the conflict, view the conflict and their behavior through the gospel, and demonstrate humility, compassion, love, and a spirit of genuine peacemaking. Ultimately, conflict resolution is a choice. The choices CBC leaders make today regarding the need to address unresolved conflict will have an impact on the church for generations.

APPENDIX 1

PERCEPTIONS OF CONFLICT SURVEY

This survey was disseminated to CBC church leaders who registered for and participated in the "Leaders and Conflict: Strategies for Better Outcomes "course. The survey assessed previous conflict resolution, comfort with resolving conflict situations, and experience managing conflict situations.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify perceptions of unresolved conflict at the Consolidated Baptist Church. This research is being conducted by Priscilla McCowan for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer survey questions before the project, and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project. For this research project, conflict is defined as a breakdown in communication that occurs when people care about an issue, disagree on the issue, and misunderstand each other about the issue.[1]

Participant PIN #...

Part 1

The following questions are general questions about your experience as a member of the Consolidated Baptist Church (CBC). Please answer each question as honestly as possible.

1. Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior?
    a. _____ Yes
    b. _____ No

2. What is your gender?
    a. _____ Male
    b. _____ Female

3. How long have you been a member of CBC?
    a. _____ 0-2 years
    b. _____ 3-5 years
    c. _____ 6-10 years
    d. _____ 10-15 years
    e. _____ 15+ years

4. How long have you been in a leadership position at CBC?
    a. _____ 0-2 years
    b. _____ 3-5 years
    c. _____ 6-10 years
    d. _____ 10-15 years
    e. _____ 15+ years

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[1] Bob Phillips, *Overcoming Conflict* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2017), 15.

5. Did you lead a ministry in previous churches in which you were a member?
   a. _____ Yes
   b. _____ No

6. As a leader at CBC, have you been asked to help resolve a conflict between brothers and sisters at church?
   a. _____ Yes
   b. _____ No

7. Have you experienced a conflict at CBC that was not resolved in a manner consistent with the teachings of Jesus?
   a. _____ Yes
   b. _____ No

8. Describe the type of conflict that is most difficult for you to resolve.

Part 2

For the following statements, share your thoughts on leadership and conflict within Consolidated Baptist Church (CBC). Please answer each question honestly within the range of strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Conflict is defined as a breakdown in communication that occurs when people care about an issue, disagree on an issue, or misunderstand each other about an issue.[2]

The following statements allow you to share your thoughts on church leadership and conflict within the Consolidated Baptist Church (CBC). Please answer each question honestly. Each question will have a six-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Answer each question as honestly as you can.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
1. From either a secular or Christian source, I have received adequate leadership training for my leadership role at CBC.						
2. CBC has provided me with adequate Christian leadership training.						
3. Through CBC, I have received training in how to resolve conflict in a biblically consistent manner.						
4. I could benefit from additional training on conflict resolution.						
5. Scripture provides clear instruction on resolving conflict.						

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[2] Phillips, *Overcoming Conflict*, 15.

6. I seek guidance from the Bible when I am faced with a conflict situation.						
7. Leaders who are spiritually mature are better equipped to successfully resolve conflict than their less mature peers.						
8. In the past, I have attempted to resolve conflict without Godly guidance.						
9. When leading others, wanting my way sometimes causes me to respond poorly to conflict situations.						
10. I have personally been involved in an unresolved conflict at CBC.						
11. Unresolved conflict is a problem at CBC.						
12. Unresolved conflict is always sin.						
13. I trust my senior leadership.						
14. If leaders fail to address conflict, it affects my confidence in them.						
15. Those in my ministry trust me to address conflict.						
16. The ministry leader has a responsibility to facilitate conflict resolutions within their ministry.						
17. I know whom at CBC can help me address conflicts.						
18. If the root issue of a problem remains unaddressed, it tends to resurface.						
19. Most conflicts at CBC are resolved in a manner consistent with the teachings of the Bible.						
20. The presence of unresolved conflict in a church can cause the church to decline.						

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM RUBRIC

This rubric was distributed to the expert panel, comprised of five persons, for the purpose of evaluating the course for biblical faithfulness, relevancy, and adult learning pedagogy.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC					
Leaders and Conflict: Strategies for Better Outcomes Evaluation Tool					
Lessons 1-6					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**Comments**
The lessons are faithful to the bible's teaching on the imperative to resolve conflict.					
The lessons are relevant to issues of conflict resolution and reconciliation in a church setting.					
The lessons incorporate adult learning principles.					
The lessons are theologically sound.					
The lessons encourage participants to examine their leadership skills.					
The lessons encourage participants to reflect on their capacity to resolve conflict.					
The lessons contain points of practical application.					
Overall, the lessons are clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 3

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

The following form was the agreement to participate in the course, "Leaders and Conflict: Strategies for Better Outcomes," presented at the Consolidated Baptist Church June 9, 2022, to July 14, 2022.

Informed Consent Form

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to explore the skills needed to resolve conflict in a way that honors God. This research is being conducted by Priscilla McCowan for purposes of minimizing the negative effects unresolved conflict may have on the health of the Consolidated Baptist Church. In this research, you will participate in a six week course on conflict resolution that is designed to increase your overall knowledge of, and build confidence in, your conflict resolution skills. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this consent form, and entering your E-mail address below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Name _____

E-mail _____

Date _____

APPENDIX 4

LEADERS AND CONFLICT: STRATEGIES FOR
BETTER OUTCOMES LESSON OUTLINE

The following outlines were used to develop the six classes for this course. The

outside reading assignments follow outline 6.

Course Title: Leaders and Conflict: Strategies for Better Outcomes
This course provides answers to the question, "What are the critical skills required to successfully resolve conflict in a Christian setting? Lessons will include a biblical perspective on selected conflict types, reasons why conflict is so challenging, and in what areas leaders need to enhance existing skills to increase their effectiveness in conflict resolution. It also provides a method to identify conflict resolution processes found in selected biblical narratives.

Lessons in the series:
Lesson One – You as a Ministry Leader
Lesson Two – The Sin of Self-Deception and Internal Struggles for Christians
Lesson Three – Conflict Skill: Humility
Lesson Four – Conflict Skill: Compassion
Lesson Five – Conflict Skill: Love
Lesson Six – Conflict Skill: Peacemaking

Lesson One – You as a Ministry Leader
Pre-lesson Assignment:
1. Read and meditate on Proverbs 2:1-12, Proverbs 6:16-19, Galatians 5:20-26, James 1:5-8 and James 4:1-12
2. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. Once completed, send to Priscilla McCowan at pmccowan1961@gmail.com.
   1. Why are you a leader?
   2. In what ways do your spiritual gifts help you as a ministry leader?
   3. What are your greatest struggles as a leader?
   4. What conflict situations do you find most challenging and why?

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:
- Articulate why you are a leader, and whether you believe it is a calling on your life
- Provide at least three reasons why conflict is often viewed negatively
- Explain conflict, conflict reconciliation, arbitration, and mediation
- Review five types of conflict prevalent in the church
- Make a distinction between characteristics of five distinct conflict styles
- Examine how detestable sin affects the ability to resolve conflict
- Identify the most important skills to effectively respond to conflict

Lesson Length – Two Hours
Target Audience – Church Leaders and potential Church Leaders
Materials Need for Lesson One:
1. Bible
2. Zoom virtual meeting platform
3. Internet/Wi-Fi access
4. Course materials
5. Completion of pre-lesson assignments

Lesson One Class Outline
1) Introduction
   a) Prayer
   b) Welcome and course agenda
2) You as a leader
   a) Discussion – How do you define leadership?
      i) John Maxwell definition – Influence, nothing more, nothing less.
      ii) Dr. Bill Lawrence definition - Leadership is the act of influencing/serving others out of Christ's interests in their lives, so they accomplish God's purposes for and through them.
      iii) Scriptures – What did Jesus say about leaders? Matthew 20:25-28. Other scriptures Joshua 1:7-9 and I Timothy 3:1-10 (NLT)
   b) Discussion question – How hard has it been to live up to the biblical expectations of leadership? What conflicts has that standard caused in your ministry?
3) Break
4) Conflict 101
   a) Question – Is your perception of conflict negative? Why?
   b) Define conflict, conflict resolution, conflict reconciliation, and mediation
   c) How would you describe your conflict style? Show examples of avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromise and collaboration.
   d) Observations about conflict
      i) Neutral until parties assign the effect
      ii) Necessary for innovation and productive change
      iii) Should be addressed maturely
      iv) Conflict is a process, not an emotion
      v) Healthy conflict is good for the church; destructive conflict can lead to church decline
      vi) Other observations from CBC leaders and characteristics of conflict
   e) Types of Conflict
      i) Internal - Conflict within oneself
      ii) Interpersonal - Conflict between two people
      iii) Inter Group - Conflict that occurs between two or more cohesive groups
      iv) Intra Group - Conflict that occurs within a cohesive group, i.e., a team or a ministry group
      v) Organizational - Conflict that occurs within a large body, i.e., a church congregation or professional association
   f) Discussion question – With which type of conflict do you most struggle and why?
   g) Behaviors that cause conflict
      i) Proverbs 6:16-19, Galatians 5:20-21, and James 1:5-8 (we will discuss the impact each of these behaviors have on our church and the ways in which they cause conflict. We will also explore God's viewpoint on these behaviors, but how easily leaders can fall prey to the behaviors).
   h) Behaviors that reduce conflict
      i) Galatians 5:22-26, Proverbs 2:1-12
   i) Skills to Focus on in this Class:
      i) The sin of self-deception
      ii) Humility
      iii) Compassion

      iv) Love

      v) Peacemaking

5) Closing Learning Points

    a) Reflections from the Lesson:

- Leadership is a calling, not just an office
- Jesus requires a servant's heart from Christian leaders
- Conflict Resolution requires a spiritually mature skill set that includes awareness of one's self, humility, compassion, love, and a peacemaking heart.
- We must die daily to behaviors God hates and strive toward the Fruit of the Spirit

Lesson Two – The Sin of Self-Deception and Internal Struggles for Christians
Pre-lesson Assignment:
1. Read and meditate on Judges 16, II Samuel 11, 12:1-25, Proverbs 16:18, Obadiah 1:3-4, Isaiah 44:13-20, Jeremiah 17:9-10, Matthew 15:7-20, I Corinthians 3:18-23, Galatians 6:3, James 1:19-26, and Revelation 3:14-20

2. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. Once completed, send to Priscilla McCowan at pmccowan1961@gmail.com.
    1. Reflect on a time when your self-deception caused you to have internal conflict.
    2. Did that conflict cause conflict with others? How did you become aware of the impact your internal conflict was having on others?
    3. How did you resolve your internal conflict?
Learning Outcomes
By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:
- Reflect on the impact the sin of self-deception has on relationships
- Discuss how Christian Leaders can overcome the sin of self-deception
- Provide biblical examples self-deception and its influence on internal conflict
- Use a biblical narrative to identify a conflict resolution strategy
Lesson Length – Two Hours
Target Audience – Church Leaders and potential Church Leaders
Materials Need for Lesson Two:
1. Bible
2. Zoom virtual meeting platform
3. Internet/Wi-Fi access
4. Course materials
5. Completion of pre-lesson assignments

Lesson Two Class Outline
1) Introduction
    a) Prayer
    b) Reflections on last class and outside assignments
2) The Sin of Self-Deception
    a) Q: What do you know about self-deception?
    b) Self-Deception definition
    c) What does Jesus say about self-deception? Matthew 15:7-11, Matthew 23
    d) Discussion – What do the Scriptures you read say about self-deception?
        i) All are susceptible to self-deception
        ii) Arrogance and Pride lead to self-deception, which leads to destruction
        iii) We must always be on guard against potential self-deception
        iv) Self-deception leads to sin
        v) The Lord examines our mind and tests our heart
        vi) Self-deception causes hypocrisy
        vii) Spiritual defilement comes from within
        viii) Worldly wisdom is foolishness
        ix) We must examine ourselves
        x) We deceive ourselves when we do not follow the teaching of God

xi) Lukewarm Christians produce little for the kingdom of God
e) Arbinger Institute's 7 steps of betrayal that lead to self-deception (p. 105)
    i) An act contrary to what I feel I should do for another is called an act of self-betrayal
    ii) When I betray myself, I begin to see the world in a way that justifies my self-betrayal.
    iii) When I see the world in a self-justifying way, my view of reality becomes distorted.
    iv) When I betray myself, I enter a box.
    v) Over time, certain boxes become characteristic of me, and I carry them with me. I see the whole world through the lens of my boxes.
    vi) By being in the box, I provoke others to be in the box.
    vii) In the box, we invite mutual mistreatment and obtain mutual justification. We collude in giving each other reason to stay in the box.
f) Discussion question – How do we break free from self-deception?
    i) Question your own virtue – frequently!
    ii) Psalm 26:2, Psalm 51:10 and Psalm 139:23
3) Break
4) Self-Deception and Internal Conflict
a) Review Types of Conflict
    i) Internal Conflict – Conflict within oneself
    ii) Interpersonal Conflict – Conflict between two people
    iii) Intergroup Conflict – Conflict that occurs between two or more cohesive groups
    iv) Intragroup Conflict - Conflict that occurs within a cohesive group, i.e., a team or a ministry group
    v) Organizational Conflict – Conflict that occurs within a large body, i.e., a church congregation or professional association
b) Internal Conflict Case Study – (If time permits, do both case studies. If time is limited, only do one of these case studies.) For each case study, answer the following questions.
    i) Sampson – Judges 16
        (1) Identify the events that led up to Sampson's self-deception and internal conflict.
        (2) What made Sampson recognize his self-deception?
        (3) Describe his inner conflict.
        (4) List the specific steps Sampson took to resolve his inner conflict?
    ii) David – 2 Samuel 11, 12:1-25
        (1) How did a man after God's own heart fall into such self-deception?
        (2) Identify the events that led up to David's self-deception and internal conflict.
        (3) What made David recognize his self-deception?
        (4) Describe David's inner conflict.
        (5) List the specific steps David took to resolve his inner conflict?
    iii) Key steps to resolving internal conflict.
        (1) Question Your Own Virtue – Frequently.
        (2) Acknowledge your behavior. Pray honestly and fervently to the Lord.
        (3) Repent and confess sins if necessary.

    (4) Ask for forgiveness from the Lord and others, when necessary.
    (5) Recommit to submission to Christ as Lord.
    (6) Die daily to selfish motives.
    (7) Serve others sincerely.
 5) Closing Learning Points
   a) Reflections from the Lesson:
- Self-Deception can destroy leader effectiveness
- Jesus condemned spiritual leaders who were self-deceived and led others astray
- Internal conflict is often a spiritual crisis
- Internal conflict often leads to other types of conflict
- Sometimes internal conflict requires outside interventions
- All conflict types will require submission, confession, repentance, forgiveness, grace and reconciliation to be resolved

   b) Pre-assignments for Lesson 3: Humility
    i) Read the following Scriptures: Proverbs 3:5-7, Mark 10:45, Luke 9:23-25, John 3:27-30, Romans 8:5-17, Romans 12:1-2, Romans 13:14, I Corinthians 15:17-21, II Corinthians 5:17-21, Galatians 2:20-21, Galatians 5:13-15, 19-26, Galatians 6:3-8, Ephesians 4:22-24, Philippians 2:3, and Colossians 3:12-13.
    ii) Be prepared to discuss areas in which you struggle to stay humble.

Lesson Three - Humility

Pre-lesson Assignment:

    i) Read and meditate the following Scriptures this week:

        (1) Required Scriptures: Genesis 13, Psalms 25:8-9, Proverbs 3:5-7, Proverbs 11:2, Proverbs 18:12, Proverbs 22:4, Luke 9:23-25, Romans 12:1-3, 16, Romans 13:14, II Corinthians 5:17-21, Galatians 2:20-21, Galatians 6:3-8, Ephesians 4:20-24, Philippians 2:3-4, Colossians 3:12-13, I Peter 5:6-9, and James 3: 13-18.

        (2) Optional Scriptures (recommended reading): II Chronicles 7:14, Proverbs 15:33, Mark 10:45, John 3:27-30, Romans 8:5-17, Galatians 5:13-15, 19-26, I Corinthians 1:28-29, and James 4:10.

    ii) Be prepared to discuss areas in which you struggle to stay humble.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:

- Discuss the biblical perspective on humility
- Understand how humility impacts leader effectiveness
- See the importance of demonstrating humility in conflict situations
- Examine the effects of leader humility on conflict resolution outcomes
- Use a biblical narrative to identify a conflict resolution strategy

Lesson Length – Two Hours

Target Audience – Church Leaders and potential Church Leaders

Materials Need for Lesson Three:

1. Bible
2. Zoom virtual meeting platform
3. Internet/Wi-Fi access
4. Course materials
5. Completion of pre-lesson assignments

Lesson Three Class Outline

1) Introduction
   a) Prayer
   b) Reflections from last week and outside assignments
2) What is Humility?
   a) Activity - Share the following information in no more than these four sentences:
      i) I know I excel at _____, and sometimes I struggle to stay humble in this area.
      ii) I know I excel in this area because _____.
      iii) I can tell when I am becoming prideful in this area because I _____.
      iv) I am reminded to stay humble in this area when _____.
   b) Humility definition – Multiple definitions for this virtue
      i) Field participant definitions
      ii) Biblical humility means believing what God says about you over anyone else's opinion, including your own. It requires embracing who you are in Christ over who you are in the flesh. To be biblically humble is to be so free of concern for your own ego that you unreservedly elevate those around you. https://gentlechristianparenting.com/humility/

iii) Biblical humility is grounded in the nature of God… Humility and meekness are often interrelated as both are righteous traits for serving the will of God. To be humble, we must have faith that God will lead us in the best way to live and what to avoid in temptation. We are to put complete trust in the Lord and not deceive ourselves with vanity or lust. We should lean on the understanding, wisdom, and divinity of God to show us the righteous path through prayer, meditation, fasting, and other faithful practices. In order to do this, we must have the initial requirement of humility to open our hearts and withdraw from the arrogance of our ego.
https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-does-humility-mean-in-the-Bible-why-should-we-be-humble.html
iv) Freedom from pride or arrogance: the quality or state of being humble. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humility.

c) What are your thoughts on this quote? Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's about thinking of yourself less – Rick Warren

d) Jesus – the greatest example of humility in the bible John 3:1-21, Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 18:1-9, Luke 14:7-14

e) Exercise – In Romans 12:3, we are told not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to.
   i) Describe the behavior of a leader who thinks more highly of themselves than they ought to.
   ii) Do they create conflict, and if so, why?
   iii) How should the church leaders approach such a fellow leader? How should they be discipled, and by whom?

f) BREAK

g) Discussion – Based on your reading, what does God require with respect to humility? (The answers should be taken directly from Scripture and should describe a humble person.) Possible answers include:
   i) Seek wisdom to fight a lack of humility
   ii) Humility requires knowledge of God's expectations
   iii) God must be first in one's life
   iv) Others must be considered before we consider ourselves
   v) Christ gives us the power to resist the devil and develop humility
   vi) Christ gave his life for us, so we have nothing to be arrogant about
   vii) Submission to Christ is the foundation of humility.

h) CASE STUDY – While humility is necessary for all conflict situations, it shines in interpersonal conflict between two or three people. Today's case study is Genesis 13. Discuss the following questions:
   i) What was the context of this narrative?
   ii) What was the relationship between the parties?
   iii) What was the basis of the conflict?
   iv) How did humility and the lack of humility factor in this narrative?
   v) List the process steps Abram used to resolve the conflict.
       (1) Maintain a quality relationship with God
       (2) Pray regularly for wisdom and knowledge
       (3) Acknowledge the problem
       (4) Diffuse the arguments
       (5) Appeal to common ground

           (6) Propose solutions

           (7) Defer to others when it will cause no harm to either party

           (8) Exercise humility in negotiations, even if the other party does not

           (9) Praise God for resolution and reconciliation

i) Reflections from the lesson

    i) Leaders must develop genuine humility as a tool for resolving conflict.

    ii) Leaders struggle to maintain genuine humility.

    iii) Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking less about yourself.

    iv) Humility is a hallmark of Christian conduct.

    v) Jesus was the greatest example of humility in the bible.

j) Pre-assignments for Lesson 4: Compassion

    i) Read the following Scriptures: Lamentations 3:22-23, Psalm 51:1-4, Psalm 86:15, Psalm 116:5, Psalm 145:8-10, Micah 6:8, Matthew 14:13-14, Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 6:34, Mark 10:42-45, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 10:25-37, John 13:14, Galatians 5:13-14, Galatians 6:1-5, Ephesians 3:20-21, Ephesians 4:32, Philippians 2:3-4, James 5:11, and I Peter 3:8-9.

    ii) Reflect on times when you needed compassion.

Lesson Four - Compassion
Pre-lesson Assignment:
- i) Read and meditate the following Scriptures this week: Lamentations 3:22-23, Psalm 51:1-4, Psalm 86:15, Psalm 116:5, Psalm 145:8-10, Proverbs 31:8, Micah 6:8, Matthew 14:13-14, Matthew 20:29-34, Matthew 25:31-46, Mark 2, Mark 6:30-44, Mark 10:42-45, Luke 10:25-37, John 13:14, Galatians 5:13-14, Galatians 6:1-5, Ephesians 3:20-21, Ephesians 4:32, Philippians 2:3-4, James 5:11, and I Peter 3:8-9.
- ii) Reflect on times when you needed compassion.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:
- Discuss the biblical perspective on compassion
- Understand how a lack of compassion impacts the communities in which we live
- Identify opportunities to demonstrate compassion inside and outside the church
- Use a biblical narrative to identify a conflict resolution strategy

Lesson Length – Two Hours
Target Audience – Church Leaders and potential Church Leaders
Materials Need for Lesson Three:
1. Bible
2. Zoom virtual meeting platform
3. Internet/Wi-Fi access
4. Course materials
5. Completion of pre-lesson assignments

Lesson Four Class Outline
1) Introduction
   a) Prayer
   b) Reflections from last week and outside assignments
2) What is Compassion?
   a) Activity – An example of what Jesus said about compassion. Examine the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) Read only
   b) Compassion definition – Multiple definitions for this virtue
      i) Field participant definitions
      ii) Biblical humility means to walk along side with empathy that compels one to do something to help the other person or situation. Baker's Bible Dictionary says compassion is, "That (human) disposition that fuels acts of kindness and mercy. Compassion, a form of love, is aroused within us when we are confronted with those who suffer or are vulnerable. Compassion often produces action to alleviate the suffering…."
      https://www.Biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/compassion.html
      iii) Compassion.com, a non-profit's definitions of compassion is, "suffering with another person, combines sympathy with an active response or a desire to help. Because we have compassion, we want to act and lessen someone else's suffering. This desire to act is what differentiates compassion from empathy,

understanding or sharing the feelings of others."
https://www.compassion.com/about/what-is-compassion.htm.
  iv) Sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to
      alleviate it. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/compassion.
  v) Discussion – In light of these definitions for compassion, answer the
      following questions about the Parable of the Good Samaritan.
      (1) Who showed compassion?
      (2) Who did not show compassion?
      (3) What contemporary parallels can we make between this parable and the
          Lexington community?
      (4) Based on your reading, what does God require of churches with respect to
          being compassionate?
      (5) Have your experiences in the church demonstrated true compassion?
          Think about a time when you needed godly compassion, and a time when
          you needed to demonstrate godly compassion toward others. Did you and
          others respond compassionately?
      (6) What are the consequences of the church's (universal, body of Christ) lack
          of compassion on the church witness? church members? community?
c) BREAK
d) CASE STUDY – This case study parable has several conflict perspectives to
   consider. Discuss the following questions:
   i)   What was the context of this narrative?
   ii) What was the relationship between the parties?
   iii) What was the basis of the conflict?
   iv) What type of conflict could this be?
   v)   What cultural issues might be influencing the conflict?
   vi) List the process steps Jesus used to resolve the conflict.
        (1) See a need and decide to respond.
        (2) Adopt a posture of humility, compassion, agape love and peacemaking
        (3) Be courageous enough to find common ground with the other group.
        (4) Seek workable solutions.
        (5) Negotiate in a way that benefits the other party.
        (6) Honor your commitments and your word to resolve the issue.
e) Reflections from the lesson
   i)   Real compassion compels us to action and mercy.
   ii) The Lord's compassion never ends.
   iii) Opposing perspectives on compassion are common in the church.
   iv) The church should emulate Christ's examples of compassion.
f) Pre-assignments for Lesson 5: Love
   i)   Read and meditate on the following Scriptures: John 3:14-18, John 15:9-17, I
        Corinthians 12-14, Galatians 5:16-26, James 4:1-8, I John 2:15-17, 3:11-24,
        4:7-21, and 5:1-4.
   ii) Reflect on God's love for you.

Lesson Five - Love
Pre-lesson Assignment:
   i) Read and meditate the following Scriptures this week: John 3:14-18, John
       15:9-17, I Corinthians 12-14, Galatians 5:16-26, James 4:1-8, I John 2:15-17,
       3:11-24, 4:7-21, and 5:1-4.
   ii) Reflect on God's love for you.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:
   • Define four primary types of love found in the Bible
   • Discuss the difficulties Christians have in demonstrating agape love
   • Explain why the saying "fake it 'til you make it" is poor theology and produces
      conflict
   • Identify agape love responses found in I Corinthians 13
   • Recognize the conflict reducing benefits of demonstrating Christ's love to all
Lesson Length – Two Hours
Target Audience – Church Leaders and potential Church Leaders
Materials Need for Lesson Five:
   1. Bible
   2. Zoom virtual meeting platform
   3. Internet/Wi-Fi access
   4. Course materials
   5. Completion of pre-lesson assignments

Lesson Five Class Outline
1) Introduction
    a) Prayer
    b) Reflections from last week and outside assignments
2) Biblical Love
    a) Video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3Yk-c9_PtQ&t=38s
    b) Definitions
        i)   Agape – Godly Love
        ii) Eros – Romantic Love
        iii) Philia – Brotherly Love
        iv) Storge – Familial Love
    c) Discussion – Why is Agape love so difficult for Christians?
        (1) Where do we see conflicts when trying to love like Jesus? John 13:31-35
        (2) Galatians 5:16-26 – How do we produce good fruit without a genuine love
            for others?
        (3) What is wrong with faking it until you make it?
        (4) What do we need to do as Christians to develop agape love?
        (5) How do leaders promote agape love within their respective ministries?
    d) BREAK
    e) CASE STUDY – I Corinthians 12-14 - This case study parable has several
        conflict perspectives to consider and to get perspective, and while the emphasis is
        on I Corinthians 13, one must also read I Corinthians 12 and 14.   Discuss the
        following questions:

i) What was the context of these chapter?
ii) Who is Paul writing to?
iii) What was the basis of the conflict he was addressing?
iv) What type of conflict could this be?
v) What cultural issues might be influencing the conflict?
vi) Exegetical study of I Corinthians 13
vii) What steps did Paul take to mediate the conflict?
(1) Paul served as a mediator (sometimes the conflicted parties cannot resolve the issue on their own)
(2) Re-training on the gospel and key concepts, i.e. spiritual gifts and love
(3) Reframed the problems in the Corinthian church through the lens of the gospel
(4) Addressed spiritual conflict using a physical metaphor
(5) Valued each person in the conflict by affirming their spiritual gifts
(6) Used love as a major theme in the reconciliation process.
f) Reflections from the lesson
i) Jesus is Love.
ii) Jesus requires us to love others as he loves us.
iii) Agape love is impossible without the Holy Spirit.
iv) Love covers a multitude of sins and promotes grace.
v) God's love for us is unconditional.
vi) Christians must choose to love unconditionally to follow Christ's example.
g) Pre-assignments for Lesson 6: Peacemaking
i) Read and meditate on the following Scriptures: Psalms 34:13-14, Psalms 119:165, Proverbs 12:20, 26, Proverbs 16:7, Isaiah 26:3, Isaiah 52:7, Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 5:9, Matthew 5: 38-48, Matthew 7:1-6, Mark 11:24-26, John 16:33, Acts 15, Romans 5:1, 6-11, Romans 8:6, Romans 12:9-21, Romans 14:19, II Corinthians 13:11, Ephesians 2:14-15, Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 4:2-9, Colossians 1:19-22, Colossians 3:12-17, I Thessalonians 5:12-23, James 1:19-20, James 3:13-18, and I Peter 3:8-12.
ii) Watch three short videos, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUHnHqlvqX4, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0nubq3c8co, and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7unyZjCflk.
iii) Reflect on times when you could have chosen peace but did not. Are you a peacefaker, a peacebreaker, or a peacemaker?

Pre-lesson assignment for Lesson 6: Peacemaking

    i) Read and meditate on the following Scriptures: Psalms 34:13-14, Psalms 119:165, Proverbs 12:20, 26, Proverbs 16:7, Isaiah 26:3, Isaiah 52:7, Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 5:9, Matthew 5: 38-48, Matthew 7:1-6, Mark 11:24-26, Luke 15:11-32, John 16:33, Acts 15, Romans 5:1, 6-11, Romans 8:6, Romans 12:9-21, Romans 14:19, II Corinthians 13:11, Ephesians 2:14-15, Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 4:2-9, Colossians 1:19-22, Colossians 3:12-17, I Thessalonians 5:12-23, James 1:19-20, James 3:13-18, and I Peter 3:8-12.

    ii) Watch three short videos, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUHnHqlvqX4, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0nubq3c8co, and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7unyZjCflk.

    iii) Reflect on times when you could have chosen peace but did not. Are you a peacefaker, a peacebreaker, or a peacemaker?

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this lesson, participants should be able to:
- Describe the attributes of a peacemaker
- Distinguish the difference between peacefakers, peacemakers and peacebreakers
- Explore the impact peacemakers and non-peacemakers have on church unity
- Identify the process used to resolve the organizational conflict during the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)
- Recognize all four types of conflict in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)
- Correlate content from lessons one-six with spiritual maturity and wisdom

Lesson Length – Two Hours
Target Audience – Church Leaders and potential Church Leaders
Materials Need for Lesson Six:
1. Bible
2. Zoom virtual meeting platform
3. Internet/Wi-Fi access
4. Course materials
5. Completion of pre-lesson assignments

Lesson Six Class Outline
2) Introduction
    a) Prayer
    b) Reflections from last week and outside assignments
    c) Activity – Are you a Peacemaker?
        i) Think about the last conflict you had in which you were sure you were right, and they were wrong.
        ii) Describe how you went about proving your position.
        iii) Pretend you have no knowledge of the gospel.
        iv) Review the conflict from the perspective of having no knowledge of the gospel.
        v) How did the conflict change?

vi) Ken Sande says, when faced with a conflict, we often resort to viewing conflict through the lens of the law instead of viewing the conflict through the lens of the Gospel. Thoughts???

vii) If God showers us daily with his love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion, why can't we do that for one another?

3) Peace and Peacemaking

   a) Q: What is peace from a biblical perspective?

      i) Only God can give lasting peace because it is part of his character.

      ii) Carries the idea of God making a covenant of peace with his people.

      iii) It is not the absence of conflict.

      iv) It is a Fruit of the Spirit

      v) God requires us to live peaceably with everyone, if possible.

      vi) A Greeting

      vii) Hebrew interpretation implied a blessing of good health and prosperity

      viii) Suggests harmony between parties by cultivating peace

      ix) What does Jesus say about peacemaking? John 14:27, Matthew 5:9, John 16:23

   b) Based on the reading and this description of peace, what are the characteristics of a peacemaker?

   c) All "peace" is not peace. There are two categories of false peace (taken from The Peacemaker by Sande)

      i) Peace Faking or Escape Responses

         (1) Denial

         (2) Flight

         (3) Suicide

      ii) Peace Breaking or Attack Responses

         (1) Assault

         (2) Litigation

         (3) Murder – literally and figuratively

      iii) Discussion – what harm do false peace tactics do to unity in the church and between others?

   d) BREAK

4) CASE STUDY – Acts 15 - Discuss the following questions:

      i) What was the context of this chapter?

      ii) What were the opposing arguments and who was proposing them?

      iii) What were some possible root causes of this conflict?

      iv) What type of conflict could this be? (organizational)

      v) What external factors might be influencing this internal conflict?

      vi) What steps did the early church leaders take resolve the conflict?

         (1) Identification of a conflict

         (2) Paul and Barnabas attempted to resolve; realized they could not and sought assistance from the other ministry leaders

         (3) All parties agreed to meet to resolve the conflict

         (4) Opposing viewpoints were debated

         (5) Conflicting issues were identified

         (6) Leaders consulted scripture before offering a resolution to make sure it aligned with Christ's teachings

         (7) Senior leader James offered a compromise

        (8) Leaders agreed to the compromise

        (9) Announced the decisions to all involved and their respective ministries

        (10)   Unity was restored in the church

    vii) Who were the peacemakers? Why?

5) Reflections from the lesson
   - i) Peacemaking requires spiritual maturity and wisdom.
   - ii) Jesus's mission was to bring peace to his followers.
   - iii) God requires us to make peace whenever possible.
   - iv) We can only live in peace with each other and God through the power of the Holy Spirit
   - v) Wicked people cannot find genuine peace.
   - vi) Peace faking and Peace breaking are destructive forces in the church.
   - vii) Real peacemaking involves reconciliation and forgiveness between conflicted persons and reconciliation of the parties back to a right relationship with God.
   - viii) Peacemaking is a choice.

6) Conclusion
   - a) Personal Reflection – Based on the characteristics of a peacemaker, and the behaviors of Peace Breaking and Peace Faking persons, who are you most of the time in a conflict situation? What choices will you make based on your assessment of your own behavior?
   - b) Discussion – What part of the class helped you grow spiritually?
   - c) Post survey

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ABSTRACT

ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF UNRECONCILED CONFLICT
ON CHURCH HEALTH AT CONSOLIDATED BAPTIST
CHURCH IN LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

Priscilla McCowan, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
Faculty Supevisor: Dr. Joseph P. Harrod

The purpose of this project was to address the impact of unresolved conflict at the Consolidated Baptist Church in Lexington, Kentucky, by teaching leaders the tenets of a Godly posture when faced with a conflict at church. Chapter 1 provides details about the purpose, goals and methodology used in the project. Chapter 2 lays the biblical foundation for addressing conflict in a church setting. Chapter 3 offers the theoretical and practical applications necessary to resolve conflict in a biblically faithful matter. Chapter 4 explains the implementation of the project. Chapter 5 evaluates the research project by examining the goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the project, and theological and personal reflections on the project.

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