

Click Here to
Buy it Now



Westminster
Bookstore

Conflict

A Redemptive Opportunity

Timothy S. Lane



www.newgrowthpress.com

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27429
Copyright © 2006 by Timothy S. Lane.
All rights reserved.

Cover Design: The DesignWorks Group, Nate Saliccioli and Jeff Miller, www.thedesignworksgroup.com

Typesetting: Robin Black, www.blackbirdcreative.biz

ISBN-10: 0-9785567-0-4

ISBN-13: 978-0-9785567-0-9

Printed in Canada

*The hardest thing to do is stick together.
Mates, family, marriage, business, bands. . . .
It's like resisting gravity. The alternative is
too predictable. You rid the room of argument.
You empty your life of the people you need the most.*

BONO, U2 LEAD SINGER

None of us live in a world where conflict does not exist. It is unavoidable. Since that is the case, it makes sense to face the fact that you *will* have conflict. Admitting this opens the door for conflict to become a redemptive opportunity to mature in Christ. Some basic perspectives can help us as we tackle the tough issues involved.

Five Preliminary Perspectives

1. The Bible is a story with conflict as a central theme.

Conflict is not necessarily bad. In fact, there is a way to do conflict that is pleasing to God. One theme that runs from Genesis to Revelation is the theme of conflict and war—and God is the Warrior! He battles against the darkness and chaos of sin and suffering. Ultimately, Jesus joins the fight and gets bloody and dies. But he emerges as Victor over the forces of darkness through his death and resurrection. He opens the way for

enemies like us to be forgiven and reconciled to him, and then invites us to join him in battle. Ephesians 6:10–20 calls Christians to take up arms against sin and darkness in the same way Jesus did: through humility, love, and self-sacrifice. We are promised that one day Jesus will return, not riding on a donkey as in his first coming, but riding a white stallion. He will come to finish his redemptive work of conflict once for all.

2. *Conflict is an opportunity.* James 1:2–4 says that trials are an opportunity to grow. Most of us think of conflict as something to avoid, but conflict is a trial that gives us an opportunity to grow in tremendous ways. In fact, James says that without such trials, we will remain immature, incomplete, and lacking many godly character qualities. While conflict will rarely be fun, it should be seen as an opportunity to grow in grace.
3. *The person with whom you are in conflict is there for a divine purpose.* When a conflict is severe, this idea can be hard to swallow. But the truth remains: God, who is sovereign, loving, and wise, sends people into our lives so that he might work in us in ways that can only happen in conflict.

Remembering this protects us from demonizing the person in conflict with us. Even if the person is truly evil and sinning in malicious ways, while we are to be wise, we do not have the option to demonize him, write him off, and view him as beyond the reach of God's redeeming grace. Only God can see these things.

4. *There will be times when you will reach an impasse in conflict.* Being realistic does not minimize your responsibility, but it does remind you that not all conflict will be resolved this side of Christ's return. In Acts 15:36–41, Paul and Barnabas disagreed over whether John Mark should accompany them on Paul's second missionary journey. Barnabas and John Mark went their way together while Paul and Silas went in another direction. There will be times when you, too, will be limited in your ability to reconcile with others. We should not let this be an excuse to stop trying to resolve our differences. But it does remind us that we are limited in our ability to change others.
5. *You must get to the heart of conflict.* Without this emphasis, you minimize the conflict, settle for quick solutions that don't last, and avoid the hard work

of godly self-examination where God wants to see you grow. When you stay on the surface and avoid looking honestly at yourself, you bypass the centrality of the gospel and your need for Christ's grace.

Conflict and James 4

No passage in the Bible diagnoses the cause and cure of conflict like James 4. It looks at conflict's ugly underbelly but it also brims with optimism, showing us a redeeming God in relentless pursuit of his children. As you walk through this passage, you will see that it answers the questions that beg for answers in the midst of conflict. Its answers are not always the ones we *want* to hear, but they are exactly what we *need* to hear.

The Cause of Ungodly Conflict

Rob could be very impatient with his wife and children, especially at the end of a hard day. He would come home from work, longing to get away from the pressures of daily life. He was going through a tough transition at work and was more agitated than normal. Sleepless nights were also taking a toll.

One evening Rob was set on a calm evening without distractions. But as he came in the door, several of his children were arguing, the phone was ringing, and

his wife was noticeably irritated that he was late. That's when it unraveled. Rob began to yell at his children, "I am sick and tired of this mess and noise when I come home from work. All I ask for is a little peace and quiet." Looking at his wife, Rob said, "I am out of here. I'll come back once I cool off and you get this place under control. Until then, I am not speaking to you!" In response, Rob's wife, Nina, grew cold and bitter as she reflected on the way she had been treated.

Here are two people engaged in conflict and doing it in very different but equally ungodly ways. Rob is aggressive in his anger. Nina is passive, fluctuating between withdrawing from Rob and trying everything she can think of to make him happy. She is growing tired of trying.

What is wrong here? Some might say that neither Rob nor Nina are getting their *legitimate* needs met. That is why they fight. The solution, in that case, would be to help them meet the other's needs to avoid this kind of warfare. Rob has a right to a clean and quiet house and Nina has a right to respect and civil treatment. What is tricky about this diagnosis and cure is that it skims the surface of truth but does not go deep enough. What would you say the problem is? How would you help Rob and Nina?