

**RELATIONSHIPS: FIGHT FAIR**  
**LIFEGROUP STUDY**  
**Jan. 17, 2021**  
**LEADER NOTES**

Welcome back to our LifeGroup series, Relationships! Today our topic is called, "Fight Fair." Conflict is the normal experience of life with others. It is how you resolve conflict that is the key. God has effective strategies for resolving conflict that all of us need to know and do. In our LifeGroup study, we'll focus in on the importance of our words in resolving conflict. We'll also dig into the vital role of being a peacemaker. Our goal is to understand and practice the keys to healthy conflict resolution.

**ICEBREAKER:** That Was a Doozy!

When I was about 10 years old, our family rented a cottage. Shortly after we arrived, my sister and I got into a huge fight about who got which bedroom. The result was my dad, who had just paid for a week's vacation, let us know we'd better resolve our fight, or else! Think back to when you were a kid. What fight did you get in with your sibling, or friend at school, that seems rather silly to you now? Was there ever a resolution to your fight? If so, what happened?

**STUDY:**

- What was a highlight for you from Ken's teaching on Sunday?

**CONFLICT: GUARDING WHAT WE SAY**

A key way to avoid unhealthy conflict is to guard what we say, to watch our words. As a group, dig into James chapter 3 for some practical insights into avoiding conflict through guarding what we say.

READ: James 3:1-12

- What does James tell us about the danger of our tongue?

LEADER NOTE: James tells us our tongue, although it is only small, makes grand speeches (vs. 5) that it is "a flame of fire" that can corrupt our entire body (vs. 6). The tongue is "untameable" "restless" "evil" and "full of deadly poison" (vs. 8) that can praise God one moment and curse other people the next (vs. 9). Overall, James is warning us about the importance and difficulty of controlling our tongue.

- In verse 2, Paul writes, “For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.” (NLT) What does he mean by this?

LEADER NOTE: James is saying the tongue is the most challenging part of our body to control. Before we know it, words fly out of our mouth that we later regret. For the Christ follower, particularly for those who teach or have leadership, it is vital to control our tongue.

READ: James 3:13-18 Pursuing Wisdom Rather than Conflict

- What are some practical ways James gives us for guarding what we say?
- What new habits might someone form to move in this direction.

LEADER NOTE: Serve others and practice humility (vs. 13). Be honest about your wrong desires that lead to conflict. (vs. 14). Jealousy and selfish ambition are things to watch for and get rid of (vs. 15). Pursue wisdom by living a life that is pure, peace loving and gentle. Show mercy, not favouritism, and be sincere. Rather than instigate unhealthy conflict, pursue being a peacemaker. (vs. 17-18)

#### CONFLICT: RESOLVING TO BE A PEACEMAKER

As followers of Christ, we are called to be peacemakers. Rather than instigating unhealthy conflict, God calls us to “seek peace and pursue it.” (1 Peter 3:11) Read the following Scriptures about how to take on the role of being a peacemaker in your world.

“If it is possible, as far as it depend on you, live at peace with everyone.” Romans 12:18

- What does this verse tell you about the challenges of resolving conflict?

LEADER NOTE: Sometimes pursuing peace is not possible. The other party may have died. There may be an addiction or mental health challenge. The other party may refuse to reconcile. We are only responsible for what we can do.

- Imagine this verse posted on top of the door of your home. How might this verse impact your relationships with others?

“Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.” 1 Peter 3:10-11

- Think about verse 10. See if you can come up with 2 or 3 examples of “evil” or “deceitful” speech that can lead to conflict. What words could you use instead that could lead to peace?

LEADER NOTE: Evil speech could include words that tear down and discourage others. Deceitful speech are lies we tell in conflict, mispresenting facts about a situation or ourselves in a way that escalate the issue.

- What might it look like to seek and pursue peace in your world (family, friends, colleagues)?

### THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Dr. John Gottman, a psychologist and relationship researcher in the states, identifies four unhealthy conflict styles that have potential to destroy relationships. He calls them, “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” after the four riders in the book of Revelation. As your group reads through these, know that the occasional horseman will show up in many relationships. It is when they become a pattern that they are deadly. By the way, patterns of abuse in a relationship are unacceptable. Physical or verbal abuse should not be tolerated.

Take turns reading each of these unhealthy styles of conflict and the better approach.

- Are the better approaches realistic? Why or why not?
- How do they speak to your role as a peacemaker?

1. **CRITICISM:** In a relationship, criticism can be deadly because, rather than focusing on the issue, it focuses on judging the character of the person. Criticism targets the personality of the other party, making them feel attacked. For example, “You never listen to me!” is a criticism because it targets the person rather than the issue.

**BETTER APPROACH:** Airing a **COMPLAINT** is a better approach because a complaint focuses on the issue, rather than the person. A complaint is an “I” statement, rather than a “you” statement. It clearly identifies the issue and what you hope will change. For example, “When I am talking to you and you keep looking at your phone, I feel like you’re not really listening to what I’m saying.”

2. **CONTEMPT:** This unhealthy conflict pattern is awful because it is a deliberate attempt to degrade or insult the person. Contempt includes name-calling, sarcasm, ridicule, passive aggression and negative body language such as mimicking. For example: “What are you, deaf? I can’t believe I got stuck with you!”

**BETTER APPROACH:** Determine to cut out name calling completely. Rather than focusing on negativity, build an atmosphere of respect through gratitude and appreciation. Look for the positive in the other person and say no to any words that will degrade or insult the other person. Remember – respect and appreciation go a long way to building an environment where conflict can be resolved in a healthy way.

3. **DEFENSIVENESS:** Defensiveness is about using protective behaviour to avoid criticism. It can include making excuses, claiming innocence and not accepting responsibility for actions. If someone is feeling criticized, it is natural to want to try and deflect. The problem is, deflecting blame back to the critic will only escalate unhealthy conflict. An example of defensiveness is: “My hearing is just fine. I’m not the one with the problem!”

**BETTER APPROACH:** Avoiding defensiveness happens as we admit our faults and accept responsibility. This approach acknowledges the feelings and validity of the other person. Even if their approach has been unhealthy, acknowledging our faults can be a powerful way to reconcile conflict in a healthy way.

4. **STONEWALLING:** This the last of Gottman’s “Four Horsemen” analogy – when a person refuses to communicate in conflict. This may be a refusal to talk or make eye contact. A person may leave the room or hold up their hand indicating, “Just stop.” Stonewalling is not necessarily a rejection of the other person. Sometimes it is an attempt to cool down and get control back.

**BETTER APPROACH:** Rather than stonewalling, if you are feeling overwhelmed or if emotions are escalating out of control, ask to take a break. Agree to a time you will come back together to revisit the issue.

## **PRAYER:**

Pray for the N Family as they return this month to the mission field in Southeast Asia. Erin has already gone ahead to secure her work permit, needed in order to get her visa. Pray for safety, success and also protection from Covid in her travels

Pray for Jason and their 3 daughters as they follow Erin over in another week or so, for safe travels and transitions.

Pray for their personal effects and supplies they are bringing from Canada that they will need in their next term of service, for all those items to arrive safe, dry and intact.