

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
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Series: Fool Proof  
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### Fool Proof Conflict

Proverbs 18:2

**“<sup>2</sup>Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.”**

Well, my wife said something funny in life group a couple weeks ago, so I just figured I'm just going to tell the whole church what she said. So, a couple of weeks ago, we were in life group, and a lot of people in our group they've got young kids and a few of them are just talking about how difficult it's been parenting them in this season. They're throwing tantrums and they're not sleeping and they're yelling and they're hitting kids and it's like oh my gosh. As a first-time dad, I hear that and I just go, these people have no idea what they're doing. Like, they're not disciplining their kids well, they're not fostering joy in the house, like, what's going on with these people? And after we talked about it for a while my wife just said, "Man I'm so grateful that our daughter just doesn't have the personality that will throw tantrums." That was literally just a couple of weeks ago and almost exactly after that we entered into a brand-new season of parenting. Because she's almost 2 years old now, and just to kind of define what this season has been like for us, and again it's just been a few weeks, last Friday my wife came home from the library with a book called "Hands Are Not for Hitting." So that's where we're at right now.

And she's just started to do some crazy stuff. Like when stuff doesn't go her way, whenever there's this conflict within her she does the wildest things. Like just yesterday, she likes to wash her hands with soap. Like whatever, that's her thing right now which is great, it's healthy. So yesterday I picked her up and she washed her hands in the sink and I poured soap on her hands. And she does it and it's great and I set her down and she goes, "Dad one more time? One more time?," and I'm like, "No, no we can't do that one more time." And when I say no she just goes like this (gets down on the ground). I'm like, girl what in the world is going on? Like, you're going to hurt yourself. What're you doing? She's started raising her voice when things don't go well. But then there's been this other thing though, I've kind of been a little excited about, because I think she's going to go to Baylor on an athletic scholarship, cause I think she's going to be a great outfielder for our softball team. Because whenever she's playing with these toys and if she can't get it figured out, she'll try and put it together and then she'll just look at it and go boom. And like, throw it as far as she possibly can. And I'm like "No, no, no don't do that...actually do that again. I want to see that again, that's kind of impressive."

And there's been this other thing that we're trying to do now when she does something wrong, or if she's disrespectful to mom... Apparently, you're supposed to get down on, like, her level, so I'll just go, "Hey Jacie. Mom is over there. Hey, will you go tell Mom you're sorry? Will you go over and walk to Mom and say I'm sorry?" And she'll just go boom, and just like, run off the exact opposite way. And it's like, man alive, all of these reactions are so immature. We're going to figure it out I promise. And Jacie, if you're listening to this in like 15 years, you're a great kid. We do love you. But you know all those reactions they're understandable for a two-year-old. Like, we know what we're signing up for in parenting. Like, it's all fair game, we understand that all those reactions are understandable in conflict for a two-year-old. They're embarrassing for a 22-year-old. And a 28-year-old college pastor. And a 52-year-old parent.

Because you see, what she does, it's all exaggerated. I see all that stuff all the time. In my life, and in the lives around me. You see our tendencies stay the same, our reactions stay the same, our emotions stay the same in conflict. When we don't get what we want, when we hurt people or when we're hurt by other people, we still overreact just crazily. Like, I'm telling you I see this all the time in ministry. Or I'll hear people and husbands talking about how they got in a fight with their wife, and they'll explain what's going on and I'll just be like "Man, you said what to her?" Like, you yelled your voice, and you said what? Are you serious? Or maybe you get in conflict with someone in your life group, so you just stop going to life group. Like, boom you're done. It's over. Like, what? You're just completely avoiding it? Or you get frustrated with your boyfriend because he hangs out with his roommates all the time. You don't get to spend enough time with him, so you just stopped responding to his text for a couple days. It's like, what are we doing? And the thing is in conflict most of the time we don't know what to do and we just rely on our emotions. And I don't have to tell you it doesn't go well for us.

Many of us have not seen conflict go well, which is why today we need to talk about conflict. Who are we supposed to be in the midst of conflict? And today we are going to be continuing on in our sermon series called "Fool Proof" where we're trying to fool proof our life, keep ourselves from doing foolish things. We're looking at the book of Proverbs and looking at different areas of our life to make sure we are not a fool in them. And today we're going to look at how to not be foolish in the midst of conflict. We're going to take a lesson on conflict from Solomon, the second wisest person after Jesus, who's ever lived.

And it's important for us to take a lesson from him on conflict because for many of us, we have really received only one lesson on conflict in our life and it was from our parents. Like, growing up we figured out how to do conflict based on watching our parents. And maybe your parents were screamers. Like, you just grew up and the house was always really loud. Or maybe for some of you your parents were avoiders, they never actually addressed anything. Or maybe for some of you, one parent always domineered over the other and you've learned how to do conflict based on what they did. And some of you have just grown into that and do the same thing. Or

some of you, the pendulum has shifted where if they were screamers, you're an avoider. Or if they were avoiders, you engage in conflict far too much. But there's a better way. There's a biblical way.

Scripture gives us clear guidelines on what we can do in conflict, and this is important for all of us, because for all of us in this room, conflict is unavoidable. We live in a broken world where we're going to do hurtful things, and we will have hurtful things done to us. So we need to know what to do in the midst of conflict. You know, conflict is such a huge subject. Well like, there's many shapes and sizes to conflict because there's a conflict when your roommate doesn't take out the trash. And there's a conflict when your dad walks out on your family. Like, both of those things are conflict, but those two things are wildly different. They've got wildly different consequences. They've got wildly different weights. They've got wildly different hurts. But the things we do in each of those instances should largely be the same.

Where there's a big conflict or a small conflict, Scripture tells us how we can act in the midst of conflict. And honestly, I don't know if anything I say today is just going to be completely mind blowing. A lot of these things will make sense, but they're not necessarily common sense. We don't naturally do these things. So, we're going to look at three things that you can do in the midst of conflict. And just to set your expectations, these are not three things that you can do to achieve a certain outcome that you want. But these are three things that you can do to achieve obedience. And we're not after an outcome in conflict, we're after obedience because we want to honor God above all else. And I also just want to say if you are in a season of deep conflict, of deep hurt, of wounds that have lasted for years, I'm not going to be able to cover all the nuances that apply to your specific situation. And if that's you, I could not recommend enough, going back and listening to a sermon series that JP did here a few years ago called "Conflicted." And if you weren't here for that or if you just need a reminder of that, I could not recommend that enough. "Conflicted." We did that a few years ago at Harris Creek, but today we are going to look at conflict in the book of Proverbs.

And we're going to preach a little bit differently than how we do the vast majority of the time at Harris Creek. Because if you've been following along in the Bible Reading Plan, Proverbs shifts in chapter 10. In chapters 1 through 9, it's written more like mini sermons. It's like mini life lessons in each chapter. But then once you get to chapter 10, it shifts into those small concise sayings. So, each verse really covers a different topic. In just four verses, you can go from words, to work, to conflict, to money, so it really wouldn't make sense to preach a section of the text. It'd be a chaotic sermon. So, while we will preach a section of the text 99% of the time at Harris Creek, today we are going to pull verses from different chapters to look at what Solomon has to say specifically on the theme of conflict.

So, I just wanted to set up why we're preaching it that way, Proverbs is really the one instance of scripture where it makes the most sense to do that.

So, we're going to start in Proverbs chapter 18. If you've got your Bibles, turn there, Proverbs 18:2 and this is what Solomon has to say. How can we be wise in the midst of conflict? Proverbs 18 verse 2. **"Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions."** We're starting here because if you can get this one thing right, this will change how you will do conflict for the rest of your life. This is what it can look like. This is just an example. This didn't happen this week, but it could have. Let's just say I got up and was ready to go to work and the night before I had to work a little bit late. And I got out the door and on my way out let's just say Adalee said "Hey are you going to be home on time tonight?" "You going to be home on time tonight?" I hear that as I leave, and I get in my car, and I drive to work and that's just what I'm thinking about. "You going to be home on time tonight?" Well like, what does she think, does she think I just want to work all the time? Like, does she think I would rather be up here working than at home with her and Jacie? What does she think? Does she think I would just work, work, work, work, work, work, work? Like, that's what I want to do? Does she think that's my preference? I'm working because I'm trying to provide for our family. Does she want me to just quit my job and hang out all the time? That's not reality, we can't do that. And I just can't wait to get home and give her a piece of my mind. Have you ever felt that before? You're replaying something in your head, and you just start thinking – "I can't wait to give them a piece of my mind." If that's you, you are a fool in conflict. Not my words, Proverbs 18:2 – Solomon says that a fool delights in airing their own opinions. So, if you don't want to be that way, here's a better way.

1. *In conflict, the wise fight to understand.*

The wise fight to understand. Here's how that conflict could've gone. Rather than just sitting in my car and sitting in my own thoughts. I could have tried to get in my wife's thoughts, and I could have just picked up the phone and said, "Hey Adalee, on my way out the door you said, 'Hey are you going to be home on time tonight', and I'm just really wrestling with it and trying to figure out your tone, and what you meant. Could you just kind of let me know why you asked that question?" And she could say "Yeah, I asked because I'm taking a meal over to someone in our life group's house tonight and just wanted to let you know I won't be home at 5:00. So, if you show up I wanted to let you know why that is." Boom conflict over. Because I didn't have all the information. You see, one of the worst things you can do in conflict is assume you have all the information. One of the worst things you can do in conflict is assume you know their every motivation. And we all know what happens when you assume, right? We all know what happens when you assume. When you assume you make a... big mistake. I heard some... What was that?...unbelievable.

You see this is why when you go into conflict you need to go in with more questions than opinions. When you go into conflict you need to go in with more questions than opinions. But this is hard for many of us. This is hard for me, so hard for me. Whenever I get in conflict, I just want to go in and say, “But I think you said it because of this.” And “I think the reason you did that is this.” And “I think you don’t carry your weight as a roommate.” And “I think,” and “I think,” and “I think,” and “I think.”

I just want to be clear. I think sometimes when you're clear you can sound cheesy, but that's fine I run the risk of that. But this phrase has been really helpful to me this week. I've learned that in conflict you'll stink if you only care to say what you think. In conflict you'll stink if you only care to say what you think. Because this is what Proverbs 18:2 is saying, it's saying you will not do conflict well, if your only goal is to just say whatever is on your mind. But I bet there's another group of people that are here today thinking – Man, my problem in conflict is not that I say whatever is on my mind, it's that I actually rarely do. I just get mowed over in conflict and I don't actually express my thoughts, and that's a different way of doing conflict. And you need to understand what your personality is in conflict.

I learned this week there are four different types of personalities in conflict. You need to know where you land because if you want to grow in conflict, you need to know what your type of personality is. So, this week, I talked with a professor at Baylor who teaches conflict management, and he gave me some just really good information that Baylor students pay thousands of dollars for and today, I'm giving it to you for free. Although we do have giving boxes back there so...I'm just kidding, I'm just kidding.

Anyway, here's this graph. Here are four different ways of doing conflict. The first is avoidance, and just to clarify the y-axis is cooperative, so that's how much you care about the other person's goals. How other person oriented you are. That's the y-axis. The x-axis is assertive and that's how much you care about your goals. You're in it for you. So, the first way of doing conflict is avoidance. I'm just not going to get into conflict with anyone ever. If that's you, no one wins. Everyone loses, no one gets what they want. You don't get what they want, and the other person doesn't get what they want. That's one way of doing conflict. Another way of doing conflict is the competitive way of doing conflict and that's what Proverbs 18:2 is talking about. That's for many of us in this room. That's what happens when we get into conflict, we just want to win. But let me be clear, in conflict when your only goal is to win, you've already lost. You've already lost. Because as Christians our goal in conflict is not to win. Our goal is unity. And for some of you, man, you're really good with your words. You're really good at getting what you want. And you're really bad at conflict because you're really good at winning. And there's the wake of people in your path that you just mowed over and it's not God's best. So that's one way of doing conflict. It's the way where you're just saying whatever's on your mind to get what you want.

Another way of doing conflict is a bunch of other people in this room. You live in the accommodation mode of doing conflict. And that's the type of person who cares deeply for the other person and doesn't really care enough about themselves and they just decide to lose. They just hate conflict so much they want to get out of it. You start saying sorry for things that you didn't even do. You start saying sorry for things that you're not actually sorry for. And then you get out of conflict and what happens is there's a fake unity because you've left a lot of unsaid hurts on the table. And that means that the other person wins, and you lose and that's not God's best either. So, this Proverb is not saying never express your opinion, it says there's a time and place for it. Just don't find your joy in expressing your opinion.

Because you see where we want to live as believers in Jesus, is in the upper right-hand corner. The collaborative way of doing conflict. Where each person is understood. Where each person eventually expresses what they feel and are understood and both people win. This is where we want to live. We want to live in unity, but we can't get to unity without first being understood. And you know if you get to the upper right-hand corner in the collaborative way of doing conflict, that's really the opposite of Proverbs 18:2. It's the opposite of the fool. Because just reading it again- Proverbs 18:2 says this, "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion."

And if we're to flip that, if that's what the foolish person does in conflict, this is what the wise person does in conflict. A wise person takes no pleasure in expressing his opinion, but only in understanding. So that doesn't mean you don't express your opinion, it just means that you don't ultimately find your pleasure in expressing your opinion. Your joy in conflict is not giving them a piece of your mind but understanding a piece of theirs. Because point number one, the first thing we can learn is that in conflict the wise fight to understand.

Okay now flipping back a couple of chapters, in Proverbs 15, we're going to read two verses from Proverbs 15, but I could pick a bunch of other verses in Proverbs that say this exact same thing. We could look at Proverbs 29 and it's really the same thing over and over again. Let's see if you can understand what he's saying. Proverbs 15:1, "**A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**" And Proverbs 15:18, "**A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.**"

Let me be clear, it is not necessarily a sin to be in conflict, but how you conflict can be a sin. And what Solomon is saying here is it doesn't just matter what you say in conflict, but how you say it. And you know there are relationships, and friendships, and marriages, that just tend to get in conflict more often than others. Honestly, my wife and I get in conflict less than other people that we're close to. That does not mean we have a better marriage, that just means our personalities are different from other people's personalities. So don't judge your relationships based on the frequency of conflict, but by the tone of conflict. That's what's so important, don't

judge your relationship based off the frequency of conflict, but by the tone of conflict. Because point number two, second thing we can learn is –

2. *In conflict, the wise fight to be gentle.*

Because the angrier conflict gets, the deeper the hurt will be later. And most often, this is not always the case, but most often, the louder conflict gets, the longer conflicts will go. We all know we shouldn't raise our voice. Like, obviously we don't want to be hot tempered people. But it can be hard to control yourself in the midst of conflict. Especially conflict with people that you're closest to. People in your life, whether you're a roommate, or kids, or your spouse, whatever it is, you can get really comfortable with them. Which makes you really comfortable with the tone and the volume that is not okay. That is not normal. I hope you're not thinking about someone else right now. I hope all of us are evaluating ourselves and what do I do in the midst of conflict? Have I gotten used to a volume and a tone that is not normal?

And just to help you think, let me tell you about my TV - yes, I know I talked about my TV last time, but it's a great illustration. So last week my TV started making a noise. And it started buzzing, and it wasn't a part of the volume. Like, I would mute my TV and it would just still kind of make this noise and it kept getting louder and louder. But my wife was like, well both of us were like, "Man, we don't want to buy another TV." So, we just kind of got used to it. And I looked it up online and I was like "Man why is my TV buzzing?" And it said something really interesting, it said if it's not correctly attached to the studs on the wall, it won't...no I'm just kidding. It's just an old TV. But it just kept making this noise, and we just got used to it. Truly we would be watching it and it would be going on in the background and we just wouldn't even notice it in the background. Because it was just kind of always there. But then last Saturday, my wife invited a friend over and I was watching the NFL playoffs. And they're just right there with me as well. And I was so embarrassed. Like, it was the only thing I could hear. All I could hear was this loud buzzing in the background and since she was there, I realized okay this is not normal. Like, we got to figure out something else. We got to get a new TV. This volume is not normal.

You see, I think this can happen in our life. In the areas and relationships of our life where we get the most comfortable, maybe it's with coworkers or your spouse. Your kids, your family, your roommates wherever it is. Those moments, those areas where you feel the most comfortable, you can get comfortable with a volume and a tone that is not okay. Just think about it - when you get into conflict, if you invite someone else into that, if someone else saw it what would they think? When your kids see your conflict, what do they think? If people in your life group saw your conflict, what would they think? My guess is for many of us they'd think "Man that is not normal." It's not just that it's awkward, it's that when you use that volume and that

tone, it's dishonoring to others and it's dishonoring to God. Because it's just flat out unbiblical. Because the Bible says this is not best for you.

It's not just the Bible, but science says the same thing. Let me tell you how science backs up the Bible. Typically, on a daily basis, we make decisions based off of our prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex of our brain is the thing that is the most highly equipped to make decisions. It can process a lot of information at once and synthesize things so that you can make the best possible decision. But what's so interesting, is when you raise your voice, when you shift your tone, the command center of your brain also shifts. It shifts from the prefrontal cortex to the limbic system. You probably don't know what the limbic system is. I didn't know what that was prior to a couple days ago either. But the limbic system in your brain is what houses all of your emotions. So, when you shift your tone, the command center shifts from the prefrontal cortex, which makes decisions based off of information, to the limbic system which makes decisions based off of emotion. This is why whenever you raise your voice, you start to say things you typically otherwise wouldn't say. You say things you otherwise don't even really believe. You say just flat-out stupid things. And it's because you're no longer making decisions based off of information, but emotion.

So, you have to understand this. I just need to make sure that you understand this. The next time you raise your voice in conflict, I hope you realize this - when you raise your voice, you're lowering your intelligence. This is what science is telling us. This is not like a Christian thing. This is a science thing. When you raise your voice, you lower your intelligence. So, the next time you do that, just know that when you raise your voice, you're lowering your intelligence. And it's not best for you.

And it doesn't just have to be yelling. Like, I'm not really much of a yeller. I know, I yell at you guys up here. But in my daily life, I'm not really much of a screamer. But what can happen is I feel the blood boiling in me, and I start talking more sternly, and more quickly, and just a harsher tone. And the same thing can happen there.

So, Proverbs says there's two different ways of speaking in the midst of conflict. There's a foolish way and there's a wise way. Let's see if you can determine the difference between the two. The Proverbs say that a foolish person in conflict speaks like this (louder and quicker) whenever they get into conflict. Their voices raise and they start talking like this and this is their tone. And they start talking faster. And this is what a foolish person does in conflict, they speak like this. But on the other hand, the wise person whenever they get into conflict, they start to speak like this (slower and quieter). Whenever they get into conflict this is what they sound like. Do you know anyone who talks like that? Man, I know that the wisest people in my life, whenever they get into conflict, what they do is they start to speak lower and slower. And they



might not even realize it, but what they're doing is they're allowing their brain to function in the way that it's supposed to.

And this is just a reminder, that whenever you're in conflict, the biggest battle in conflict is not between you and the other person. The biggest battle in your conflict is between you and yourself. Because whenever you get into conflict, you want to do and say hurtful and sinful things. Let me just say it again, that whenever you get into conflict it's not necessarily a sinful thing to be in conflict, but it's a really easy thing to sin within conflict. Because the biggest fight in conflict is not between you and the other person, the biggest fight in conflict is between you and yourself. Which is why we need to understand that, point one, the wise fight to understand and point number two in conflict, the wise fight to be gentle.

Okay let's look at one other verse in Proverbs, flipping over a couple of chapters, Proverbs 17:9, Solomon writes this: **“Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.”**

Okay so, the first two points are just talking about what to do in conflict. This speaks to the goal of conflict. Because the end goal in every conflict whether it's big, little, or small, the end goal should all be the same thing. Which should all be forgiveness. Because if you're going to love someone deeply, you're going to have to forgive them repeatedly. Because love cannot take place if forgiveness isn't present. And as Jesus' people, we don't keep a record of wrongs. Which is why point number three, the third thing we can learn is that –

### *3. In conflict, the wise fight to forgive.*

You know this verse says that those who love, cover an offense. The problem for many of us is that we've learned not to cover offenses, but to carry offenses. And it's not best for us. And this is what it looks like in your life, let's just imagine that each hurt in your life is like a rock. Every time you're hurt, every time someone does something that frustrates you, that causes pain it's like someone has just handed you a rock. (Nate adds a rock to his hands as he mentions each new hurt.) And this is what it can look like on a weekly basis. This is what can happen in your week. Let's just say you wake up to an email from a client and they say, “Hey you haven't been doing a very good job at your job, and I'm going to switch from you to someone else.” And man, that's hurtful. You've just been given this rock. And then you're getting ready for work and you're trying to love your daughter but she's just short with you and she says some things that just honestly are hurtful. And you're just given something else that hurts. And then you get on 84 and you're driving to work, and someone's driving 50 miles an hour in front of you. And the car right next to you is also driving 50 miles an hour. And you're like “It's 60 miles an hour, what in the world are you doing? Drive!” And you're behind the slowest person ever, and that frustrates you. And then you try to call your wife and she doesn't answer, and she never answers. It's like, why in the world does she even have a phone if she's not going to answer her phone. Like, why does

she have a phone. And you're just, again, you're frustrated. And then you're supposed to go to lunch with a friend and you're really looking forward to it, but they bail last minute. And it's like, man, this person is never dependable. It's just so frustrating. It's like, I put this on my calendar, and this is so disrespectful to cancel last minute on me. And then you're at work, and you're in a meeting with a bunch of other people that you work with, and your boss is leading it. And he specifically calls you out. And says something that's just totally out of bounds and not fair. And you're embarrassed in front of everyone else. And then you go to life group, and someone's talking about their career, and they got a promotion again- woo! It's just a reminder, man, that's like a hard thing in me. And it's just a reminder again that your life isn't going along the way you want it to go. And it's just another hurt. And then all of a sudden, your in-laws reach out, and they're like we don't get to see the grandkids enough. And it's like oh my gosh you saw them last weekend. Like what in the world. And you have frustrations with your in-laws. And then all the sudden, you look at the sink and your wife said she was going to do the dishes and she didn't do the dishes. And it comes out sounding like this (rocks falling and hitting the ground). And it's not about the dishes. It's about all the other stuff.

Because you're not meant to carry all these offenses. You're meant to cover them. You can't carry them all. When you just try to carry them all and take them all on yourself, it comes out sounding like this. And it's not best for you. And it's certainly not best for the people around you. So, if we're not going to carry them around, we have to do something with them because we all are going to experience hurts in our life. So, what do we do with them? What does it look like to cover them rather than carry them?

Let's just say someone at work says something hurtful to you and you're just sitting with it and you're looking at it. The decision to cover it, rather than carry it, really can come down to this – I'm going to believe the best. Man, I know John. I know that what he said, he didn't mean it in that way. It sounded like that, but I've worked with him for a long time. I know that he wouldn't actually mean it in that way, and even if he did, man I am going to lay this at the foot of Jesus, and he's forgiven.

But then there are other times when you think you've dropped something, but you really haven't. And it's not wrong. It's not a wrong thing if you feel like you're still carrying this around. Like, you've tried to drop it, but you just keep thinking about it. It's in those moments when you need to bring it to the other person. You need to bring it to them. And here's how you know if you need to bring it to them. You know you need to bring it to them if you really want to bring it to someone else. Have you ever felt that before? I know I have. In fact, that's what the Proverb says, it's almost like it was written by someone who is really wise. Because it says this, it says "Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but the other option is whoever repeats the matter separates close friends." You see, so you're either going to cover it, or you're going to repeat it. So, what it looks like in that moment is you bring it to them. And you let them know,

and then you let it go. You let them know, and you let it go. And it looks like this: you say, “Hey John, you hurt me by \_\_\_\_” or “John I was really offended when you said this” and you let it go. And it doesn't mean there's no consequences to sin. And it doesn't mean you're ignoring the sin. But it does mean you're no longer carrying it.

And if you're on the other side of that, the only correct response is “Man, will you forgive me for \_\_\_\_.” But the problem is there's so many of us in this room today where we're just carrying a lot of hurt. Hurt not from last week, or last year, but from last decade. And it's weighing you down. Because it's not God's best for you. And man, I know there's a wide variety of conflict that you've experienced in life. There's conflict that brings deep, deep hurt. Again, there is a difference to forgiving someone for not doing the dishes and forgiving someone for having an affair. Those things have wildly different consequences. Wildly different hurts. But the end result should be the same. Because Jesus says in Matthew that we're not just called to forgive seven times, but 77 times. And what he's really saying is we're called to forgive an endless amount of times. We're supposed to forgive every single offense to us.

But if you're like me, your reaction is “But no let me tell you what they did though,” “But I got to tell you what they did.” “But I have to tell you what they said because this is a unique instance.” “I got to tell you what actually happened because this is what they did and what they did and what they did and what they did and what they did.” Let me just remind you what you did. And what I did. Because you've got a perfect Heavenly Father who desired to have a relationship with you, and you said I don't need it. He desired to love you, and you said I don't need your love. I'm going to worship creation rather than the Creator. And while He said I want to provide for you, you said I'm just going to go provide for myself. And while you say there's joy to be found in you, I'm going to go find joy in the things of this world. And we looked in His face and we spit on His face. We didn't just say something that hurt His feelings. We didn't just do one painful thing, we outright rejected Him. But the beauty of the Gospel is while we rejected Him, He didn't reject us. While we said no to Him, He just pursued us all the more.

You've maybe heard it said that in conflict you need to own 100% of what you've done wrong. In our conflict with God, He owned 100% of what we've done wrong and since He so loved us, He sent His one and only son to live thirty-three perfect years and die a death that we deserve. And then He rose three days later so that we could be forgiven. And if He went through all of that to forgive us, who are we to not forgive others? As He went through all of that to reconcile us to Himself, we are now given this ministry of reconciliation. Because we are forgiven people, we are forgiving people. We do not hand out forgiveness because they've earned it. We hand out forgiveness because we don't earn it. And we no longer count people's sins against them because He no longer counts our sin against us. And this is no small thing to the heart of a Father. Because let me remind you what Jesus says in the Lord's Prayer – I bet you know it, you've said it a thousand times in your life – but you might not be living it. He says this “Father forgive us

our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” And some of you, man, you've been living in unforgiveness. And again, I don't know your situation, and I don't know how deeply painful it is. And I bet it is. But just as one of the pastors here, can I just say man, if you're living in unforgiveness, I don't think you know how much you've been forgiven from. Because from the person who's been forgiven of much, we forgive much. And I want your sins to be forgiven so I want you to forgive others because this is what Jesus has said. This is what Proverbs has said. Because, in summary, point number one, in conflict the wise fight to understand. Point number two, in conflict, the wise fight to be gentle. And point number three, in conflict, the wise flight to forgive.

You know really to summarize what Solomon says all across Proverbs on conflict, I've got to take you back to my high school football career. And you know many people believe that if not for politics, I'd still be playing. But that wasn't the case for me. I played tight end. If you don't know what a tight end is, it's like part wide receiver, part lineman. So, you spend half your time with the receivers in practice, which is the fun part, then you spend half your time with the offensive lineman in practice and it is just brutally boring. If you've never played football, football practice can just be so boring. Because as an offensive lineman, there's really only one drill you can do. You just do the same thing again and again and again. You line up in your stance and you just hit this blocking dummy. Again, and again and again. And I only remember really one thing from football practice in high school. Our offensive line coach is really just paid to say one thing over and over and over again. And years later I still remember because we get down in this stance and then he'd say, “low man wins, low man wins, low man wins.” Because you see when you're in this stance what your body wants to do is it wants to come off high. And when you come off high, you get blown backwards. Because in that conflict, the low person is the only one who's actually going to win. You see, I think my offensive line coach knew something. I think he read Proverbs. Because this is what Solomon is saying over and over again. He says in conflict the low man wins. Because you see in conflict, what you want to do is you want to come out high. You want to come out saying – “But I think you did it this way” and “This is what I think you need to do” and “Here's what I think.” You want to come out with so much pride, but when you come out high you lose. See the only person to win in conflict is the person who comes out low. Who comes out eager to understand, eager to be gentle, eager to forgive, eager to be humble. Because this is the wise thing to do. But it's not just the wise thing to do. It's the Jesus thing to do.

In our conflict with Him, our sin had created enmity between ourselves and God, and in that conflict, this is what your Savior did. Philippians 2, “**<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; <sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even**

**death on a cross!”** You see in our conflict with Him, He went as low as He could get. Although He was God, He chose to become man. Although He was a King, He chose to be born in a slimy manger filled with animals. And although He was the author of life, He was willing to be put to death and be crucified by His creation. But His story does not end with Him entering a tomb, but with Him exiting it - holding the keys to life, death, and the grave. And since He came out low, He came out ahead. And if that's how He won the conflict of all conflicts, how much more should we live that way in our everyday conflicts as well. Let me pray that we would.

Father thank you so much that you don't ever ask us to do anything that you haven't already shown us how to do. You don't ask us to do anything that through the power of the Holy Spirit we don't have the ability to do. I just want to admit that it's really hard to do conflict well. It's really hard to be humble in the midst of hurt. But Father, I just pray that we'd be a church that's known for handling conflict well. That we wouldn't avoid it, we wouldn't run from it, but we'd lean into it with humility and grace. Fighting to understand, and fighting to be gentle, and fighting to forgive. And may we never see the other person as the opposition, but only our flesh is the opposition.

And God I know that in this room, and in the lobby, and online, even as I'm saying this, there is a lot of conflict. Conflict that has lasted years. God, I pray that you would do something that we wouldn't even believe if we were told. I pray that in the coming days, sisters would talk to each other for the first time in years. I pray that sons would talk to their dad for the first time in years. And that we would be ministers of reconciliation. And that we can see you do things that only you can do. So, God even as I'm praying this, I pray that your Holy Spirit would be at work in those people's hearts, the people that we're in conflict with. Whether we need to ask for forgiveness, or they need to ask for forgiveness, God I just pray that you would work it all out and that you would bring unity to your people. And God in those areas of our heart where we just have unforgiveness towards other people, would you root that out. Would we see face-to-face with how much we've sinned, but we'd also see face-to-face with how much you've saved. And would we let go of sins against us because you've let go of far more sins against you. So, Father we believe that you can do all of this because we believe in a God who is alive and with us and for us. And it's in His powerful name that we pray. Amen.