

THE WISE RESPONSE TO CONFLICT (VARIOUS PASSAGES)

*This message is adapted from JD Greear's series called "Still Standing."

All of us have conflict from strained and broken relationships:

- A friendship that ended badly.
- A dating relationship that went sideways.
- You left a church because of conflict with someone.
- A nasty school situation, which causes you to avoid certain people.
- Family conflicts, etc.

The point is, we all have conflicts in life – even if we didn't cause or intend it to happen. The good news is, Solomon shares some incredible wisdom on how to *respond* when we encounter conflict.

And BTW, Solomon should know all about conflict because he had 700 wives! (For the record: God had warned him NOT to do that!)

So, let's look at 5 principles on dealing with conflict...

1. React Slowly.

It's becoming more and more common for people to have knee-jerk, highly emotional responses to conflict.

Proverbs 15:28 "The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things."

Illustration: When I was your age, MTV changed the world (for the worst) by airing a brand-new type of television show that became known as "Reality TV." You've grown up with reality TV, but it all started when MTV aired a show called "*The Real World*." On this show, they put a group of young people (guys and girls) in a house together – complete strangers with different personality types – and we all watched the drama unfold.

So, for the first time, a television show was *designed* to initiate highly emotional responses. Why? Because it's like a car wreck – something in us wants to see it play out. The drama gets ratings and clicks. And that's why scenes of people yelling, screaming, cussing, and fighting are

commonplace now on the news, Television, and social media. We've been conditioned to respond quickly and irrationally.

Proverbs 14:29 "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly."

Proverbs 29:11 "A fool gives full vent to his spirit [no restraint], but a wise man quietly holds it back."

So, when a wise person faces conflict, they "ponder how to answer" rather than a quick, emotional response. Why? Because when you take a minute to ponder your response, it allows you to do a couple of things:

- **You're able to get some emotional distance.** I've learned to live by the *24-Hour Rule*. When I'm blind-sided, overwhelmed, or angry about something – if I take at least 24 hours (sometimes longer) to sleep on it and give God time to work, it almost always looks different and God provides the solution.
- **You're able to get more of the facts.** I can't tell you how many times I've overreacted – only to later find out the *rest* of the information.

Proverbs 18:13 "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame."

2. Resist Pride.

Proverbs 19:11 "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense."

Why is it your "glory" to overlook an offense? Because a wise person is humble enough to realize they could make the same mistake.

"If you think you are naturally wise, then you are a fool. But if you know you are naturally foolish, then you are wise." – JD Greear

So, wisdom allows you to overlook an offense and be a little more sympathetic because you know that you're capable of the same things...

Proverbs 11:12 "Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent."

You see, the wise person says, "I need to be careful about 'belittling' this

person because I could easily make the same mistake." But most of us have a knee-jerk response that is fueled by pride – a sense of being superior: "I would never do that!" But if you understood your own sinful tendencies, you wouldn't be so quick to respond with anger.

3. Release Vengeance.

Proverbs 17:9 "Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends."

The word "covers" is not talking about glossing over an issue where you pretend it didn't happen, or you let people trample all over you. It actually means something much different.

Illustration: When you go out with a group of friends to dinner, and you say, "I'll cover it." You don't mean, "Let's just gloss over it by pretending we didn't eat and leave without paying." No, you're saying, "I'll absorb the financial damage for what *you* ate." The word *cover* means "to absorb."

You see, our natural response is vengeance toward the person who offended us. But the wise person covers (absorbs) the offense. Again, it doesn't mean you become a doormat for others to step on and take advantage of. No, it simply means your first response is...

Proverbs 20:22 "Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the Lord [24 Hour Rule], and he will deliver you."

So, let me show you how this plays out in two different scenarios:

- **When a fellow Christian hurts you.** Say, "Thank God that Jesus died for the sin they just committed against me, AND for the sins I've committed against others. He "covered" (absorbed) the vengeance that we BOTH deserve."
- **When a lost person hurts you.** Say, "God promises that one day He will settle all scores. Vengeance is *not* mine, it's His. I'll leave this in His hands."

So, regardless of who hurts you – you don't have to carry around bitterness and vengeance in your soul. You can let go of it because you know that Jesus has not only covered *your* sins, but He will also settle all scores with those who hurt you. This mindset allows you to...

4. Respond Graciously.

Proverbs 25:21–22 “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,²² for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.”

You may say, “Now *that’s* what I’m talking about – dumping some hot coals on my enemy’s head!” But this phrase is actually referring to a psychological effect that’s achieved through unexpected kindness:

- **Unexpected kindness can cause a “burning” sense of shame and remorse.** When you treat an enemy with unexpected kindness, God can use it to break down their animosity and lead them to repent and change their ways.
- **Unexpected kindness can cause their cold hearts to “melt”.** Ancient people often carried pans of hot coals on their heads to keep warm or to carry fire from one place to another. In the same way, your unexpected kindness can melt away the “coldness” in another person's heart.

You see, we think the way to change somebody is to scold them or shame them – to “make them pay.” But most often, GRACE is how you change a person. For example, very few people in the middle of an argument will say, “Oh, now that you’ve yelled at me and told the whole school what I did - *NOW* I see the error of my ways! What was I thinking?”

No, your highly emotional *reaction* typically just elevates the drama. So, your unexpected kindness is a way to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

5. Remember Mercy.

Proverbs 16:6 “By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil.”

It’s much easier to turn away from evil when you understand how *your own* sin was atoned for. The word *atoned* means “paid.” How was your sin paid for? By the steadfast love and faithfulness of Jesus. BUT, those two words are hard to put together, because they raise a dilemma.



How can God show sinners “steadfast love,” yet remain “faithful” to His just punishment for sin?

Well, this dilemma was solved at the cross. God's just demand for perfection is fulfilled by Jesus when He came and lived a perfect life in our place. And the wrath that our sins deserved was poured out on Jesus at the cross. He absorbed the punishment in our place.

What is our response?

- Some of you have been hurt by conflict, and that resentment is poisoning your soul – it's controlling you – and you need to make a decision to get rid of it.

Illustration: There's a *really old* show that is silly and stupid called *"The Three Stooges."* In one of those episodes, Mo kept hitting Curly on the chest. Curly says, "I'm going to get even with that guy!" So, he takes a stick of dynamite and straps it to his chest and says, "Next time he slaps me, I'm going to blow his hand off!"

And that may be true – it will blow Curly's hand off, but Mo would kill *himself* in the process. In the same way, bitterness, anger, and unforgiveness does more harm to YOU than it does to the other person. You need to release the vengeance.

- For some of us here tonight – you're the *cause* of conflict. You *are* the knee-jerk, short-tempered, highly emotional person that leaves a wake of conflict in your path. I don't mean that as an insult, I'm just a friend speaking truth into your life. Resist your pride and repent.
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Small Groups