

Conflict Management

Lesson designed by: Mark Blackwelder

Course description: Part 1

This course deals with principles for understanding and resolving conflict in the home, the church, and life in general. This particular lesson will focus on the definition and components of conflict.

Course Objectives: By the end of this class students will be able to:

- A. Define conflict in a way that demonstrates understanding.
- B. Identify seven conflict “myths” that promote unhealthy views of conflict.
- C. Understand the components of conflict that are common in a variety of settings.

Outline of the class:

- A. During the first ten minutes of the class divide students into groups of three or four and ask them to agree on a definition of conflict.
- B. Afterward, ask the groups to share their definitions and discuss common elements.
- C. Following this small group discussion, consider the following definitions (Gangel and Canine 2002) and ask students to highlight their strengths and weaknesses.
 - 1. “A situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being attainable by one or the other but not by both.”
 - 2. “Two or more objects aggressively trying to occupy the same space at the same time.”
 - 3. “A struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals.”
- D. Discuss the following “myths” about conflict (Gangel and Canine 2002) and how they promote an unhealthy view of conflict.
 - 1. Conflict is abnormal and should not happen in good relationships.
 - 2. Conflict and disagreement are the same thing.
 - 3. Conflict is pathological—someone involved has a mental issue.
 - 4. Conflict must be reduced or avoided. It is better to never have conflict.
 - 5. Conflict is a personality problem—it happens because some people like to fight.
 - 6. Conflict is linked only with anger (and anger is bad, right?)
 - 7. Conflict is admission of failure. It wouldn’t have happened if we did things right.

- E. Share and discuss the following “Components of Conflict” (Gangel and Canine 2002).
1. Interdependence – We experience conflict, at least in part, because we need others and they need us. If this were not the case, then whether others agreed with us would not matter!
 2. Interactive struggle – It is also true that conflict cannot happen unless our sphere of operation overlaps with someone else’s. In other words, we generally only experience conflict with those who are close enough to engage us. In fact, the closer they are, the more conflict matters to us!
 3. Incompatible goals – As definition #2 above indicates, sometimes we experience conflict because we desire the same thing, and we don't think we can both have it. This is the “zero sum game” mentality—if you get what you want, I don’t get what I want. This may not be actually true, but if you both think it is then conflict will likely result.
 4. Perceived interference – If I want a particular thing (or person, or result) and you are between me and what I want, we will likely experience conflict. Like the previous component, what is important is not whether the interference is actual, only that we perceive it to be.
 5. Interface of opposition and cooperation – There must be some agreement as well as disagreement for conflict to take place. It is this tension that makes conflict worthwhile and genuine.
 - * As parties engage in conflict, they are also validating the larger body of which they are both a part. So, when you experience conflict, it might be good to stop and appreciate that you actually have something in common!
- F. Ask students to share some their own conflict experiences that validate the components listed above. Can they see these components in real-world situations?

Conclusion:

- A. Conflict is a normal part of the human experience. It can be a healthy process when it is managed with appropriate expectations and an awareness of its components.
- B. Conflict is actually an indication of the people and values that are important parts of your life.
- C. In the next lesson, we will examine the biblical origin of conflict and what we can learn from that.