

JESUS & RELATIONSHIPS

Lesson 3: Dealing with a Difficult Relationship

What we want students to learn: That Jesus laid out the right way to deal with conflict in a relationship.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To help define the modern day equivalent of Jesus' conflict resolution strategy, and to commit to following it.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 18:15-17

Overview: Jesus' teachings don't always prescribe a plan of action. Often they deal with concepts, ways of applying God's truth to the world around us. But in this passage, Jesus gives what amounts to a step-by-step process of how to deal with conflict in a God-honoring way. The cool thing will be for you and your students to practice what good Bible students call "bridging the cultural gap." Your goal will be to take Jesus' teachings from this passage and come up with a practical equivalent for modern day application. Then, challenge your students to embrace this model for dealing with conflict in a way that is in line with someone who seeks to live as Christ lived.

Teacher Prep Video

The *Jesus And Relationships* Teacher Prep Videos are short videos designed to help you grasp the main points of the lessons as you prepare to teach.

To access your "Jesus And Relationships Lesson 3 Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-relationship-teacher-prep>

Bible Background

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details gives you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every ym360 Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know who wrote the book, when it was written, and why it was written.
- **What's The Big Deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

The Details

- **Author:** Matthew, a former tax collector, was a disciple of Jesus and a firsthand witness to the stories he relates in his gospel.
- **Time frame:** Most people hold to Matthew's gospel being written in the late 50's or 60's AD, though there are some who think it was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.
- **Purpose:** Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience to convince them that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. But he was probably aware of a Gentile audience, as his gospel makes the case that the saving truth of Christ is for all nations.

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The Setting

In Matthew 18, Jesus is giving a discourse on what life in the Kingdom of God should be like. He continues this through chapters 19 and 20, right up to the point of His triumphal entry and last days on earth. He speaks of relationships, forgiveness, and life together in His Kingdom as His followers.

The Main Point

The main point of this lesson is for teenagers to commit to implementing a way of doing relationships that goes contrary to what our society says is the right way. They should see that Christ's example and instructions lead them to maintain an attitude of humility when dealing with others, along with a heart of forgiveness and compassion when in conflict. Though some relationships will go through each step Christ lays before us and still aren't reconciled, the end of verse 17 implies openness to restoration at any point repentance comes about.

Students who live as Christ-followers are to look different to the world around them. In order for this to happen, they must act differently. The way they handle relationships is part of this. Though it may be difficult and go against their fleshly desires for revenge, vindication, and being right, following Christ means dealing with others with tenderness, compassion, and humility.

Lesson Plan

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: An introductory activity called The Lead In; the Bible study section called The Main Event; an application-focused segment called The Last Word.

The Lead In

- **Goal:** To help students begin to think about the concept of dealing with difficult relationships through biblical conflict resolution.
- **Set-Up:** You'll want to do prepare a few different conflict scenarios that your students can respond to. You can find an example of what these look like by clicking on the following link:
 - o <http://www.ncpc.org/programs/teens-crime-and-the-community/community-works-session-enhancements/section-1/session-7/role-play-scenarios.pdf>
- Feel free to simply use the examples listed from the link above. But many teachers may find that creating your own allows you to engage with your students in a more relevant way.
- Regardless of what you choose to do, you'll need to be prepared to either print and distribute the scenarios to your students, or to read them aloud and process them as a group.

FIRST, divide your students into three groups. Then, depending on how you've decided to present the conflict scenarios, move forward with presenting the scenarios to your group. Either facilitate the discussion as a group, or allow students to discuss within small groups. Make sure for whatever scenario you choose, you work as a group to determine the best way to handle the conflict scenario.

THEN, once students have completed their discussions bring them back together and lead them in a short discussion by asking something like:

- **How prevalent is conflict in your life? Would you say it's something you deal with a lot? Or not very much?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **If you're being honest, how likely are you to handle conflict in a way you would consider healthy?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **What does conflict in your relationships make you feel like?**
 - o Answers will vary.

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FINALLY, transition to The Main Event by saying something like:

- **This is the third moment where we will look at what Jesus had to say about relationships. As you may have guessed, this lesson is about conflict. There are many different ways people handle conflict. Unfortunately, in our world, many choose to handle conflict in ways that may be hurtful, damaging, or even dangerous. As Christ-followers, we are instructed to handle conflict resolution in a very specific way. Let's take a look at how Christ has instructed His followers to work to resolve conflict.**

The Main Event

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that Jesus laid out the right way to deal with conflict in a relationship.
- **Set-Up:** None

FIRST, make sure students get caught up on what you've studied so far. See if anyone can recall what you learned the last two weeks. Use the following bullet points to help if needed:

- **Lesson 1: You learned that understanding and grace are keys to Christ-centered relationships.**
- **Lesson 2: Students learned that there is no room for anger or hostility in Christ-centered relationships.**
- **Lesson 2: Students were challenged to evaluate whether or not they had lost their temper with someone recently, and if so, to commit to making amends.**

THEN, have students set up the Bible study by identifying some things that may cause conflict between friends. They may answer with things that seem petty or unimportant but make sure you acknowledge all of their serious answers. Ask them to then list some ways teenagers may deal with these conflicts. After allowing time for answers and some discussion, transition by saying something like:

- **There are many ways to handle conflict as we have just discussed. People handle this in different ways, often based on the situation (whether it is something they consider minor or very important), the relationship they have with the other person (if they consider the other person a valued friend or someone they don't want to bother with), or their own personality (one person may be passive and pretend the problem doesn't exist while another may be more aggressive and act out in anger). However, if we are trying to live our lives as Christ-followers, we must handle conflict according to the way He has instructed.**

NEXT, have students open their Bible to Matthew 18. As they are finding the passage, explain to them how Jesus often did His teaching in parables, or stories, that make His instruction relatable. Some of these parables were symbolic or metaphorical and required a certain level of interpretation. But explain that when it comes to handling conflict in relationships with other Christians, Christ was very clear in describing a step-by-step process.

THEN, read or have a student read Matthew 18:15-17 aloud. Begin your discussion by having students think about common ways people today, especially teenagers, may handle conflict. Use the following questions to guide your discussion of this passage:

- **When teenagers have disagreements or conflict, how do they normally respond at first?**
 - o Answers may vary but should include the fact that most will often tell other people their side of a story rather than deal with the person they are in conflict with. There is a sense of building teams or sides.
- **Look at verse 15. What does Jesus tell us is the first step to handling conflict? Why do you think that may be difficult?**
 - o Answer: You are to go to the person you have a conflict with and discuss it between the two of you.

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Say something like:

- **There are many reasons why people choose to bring other people into a conflict rather than approaching the other person one on one. When people feel they have been wronged, they often find comfort in having people to support their side of the story or point of view. For a Christ follower, talking about conflict with other people is never the first step to take. However, there may come a point where other people may need to be involved.**

Then, ask:

- **According to the passage we read, what is the second step to handling conflict?**
 - o Answer: Take one or two others along to talk to this person again.
- **How do you know you need to take this step?**
 - o Answer: If the person you are in conflict with will not listen or try to work out the problems.

NEXT, have students turn to Deuteronomy 19 and have verses 15-17 aloud. Continue the discussion with these questions:

- **When Jesus tells His followers to “take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses,’” He is quoting from part of the Law that is found in Deuteronomy 19. Based on the response of the first confrontation and the passage you just read from Deuteronomy, why do you think Jesus would have you include other people in conflict resolution at this point?**
 - o Answer: The person you are having conflict with didn’t listen the first time and may be angry. They may be defensive or willing to say anything that would allow them to appear innocent or victimized. Bringing one or two along serve the purpose of having witnesses in the event of false statements being made. However, when you choose the right people, they can also offer wise counsel to both people involved.
- **Notice that Jesus doesn’t tell us to choose one or two people who will see your side, agree with you, or defend you even if you’re wrong. So how should you choose the people who will go with you? Are there certain traits they should have?**
 - o Answer: Though answers may vary, be sure to point out the following things: These people should be wise. They should be able to see the story from both sides and be willing to help both people see where they may be wrong. If conflict is to be handled according to Christ’s commands, they should also be Christ followers.

It’s important for students to understand that Jesus was not encouraging the offended person to find someone who would simply support them, back them up, and help them to be right. His desire is for Christ-followers to work toward reconciliation in relationships. To help students understand this, say something like:

- **We live in a culture often has and encourages a “me-first” attitude. We are told we must look out for ourselves. When two people have an argument or experience conflict, they typically desire to be right more than admitting our wrong. Christ calls His followers to behave differently. We see in this passage that He calls His followers to use all possible avenues to restore relationships.**

Then, ask:

- **As with the first step of reconciliation in verse 15, there are two possible responses. What are these?**
 - o Answer: The other person will either listen and the relationship is on the way to reconciliation or they won’t listen and it’s necessary to take one more step.

THEN, have students look again at Matthew 18. Read the first part of verse 17, the third step in dealing with conflict. Ask:

- **After you have tried to fix your relationship one on one and with mediation from others, Jesus offers one more step if those don’t work. What is the third step?**
 - o Answer: Bring it before the church.

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- **This is not something we are accustomed to seeing in the church today. What are some ways we can put this instruction into practice when dealing with conflict in relationships?**
 - Answer: This step, in essence, brings the first two together. They build together rather than stand alone. Students may have a variety of ways of addressing this. Some ideas may include: meeting together with a small group leader or your student minister. This meeting should also include the people who were part of your second meeting.
- **Is there any guarantee that this is going to work to reconcile the relationship? If none of these steps work, what does Jesus tell His followers they should do?**
 - Answer: No. "Treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector"
- **In Scripture, men like Matthew and Zacchaeus, were described as tax collectors. Based on what you know about their stories and their interactions with Jesus, what does this say about how we should ultimately treat someone who refuses to reconcile a relationship?**
 - Answer: You cannot force them to restore the relationship, however, if the day comes when they are repentant and willing to reconcile the relationship, every effort should be made for restoration. Though people like tax collectors and pagans were known to behave in opposition to Christ's ways, grace and forgiveness were always available for them. We must have the same attitude and willingness to forgive that Christ demonstrated.

FINALLY, transition to The Last Word by leading students to think about their own attitude when dealing with someone who has hurt or offended them. Say something like:

- **For us to have true reconciliation and for Christ's steps to resolving conflict to work, we must go into this process with the proper attitude. That attitude is one that should mirror Christ's own attitude.**

The Last Word

- **Goal:** To help define the modern day equivalent of Jesus' conflict resolution strategy, and to commit to following it.
- **Set-Up:** Have either a large piece of paper and markers. Write the title "Steps to Reconciliation" across the top.

FIRST, have students turn to Philippians 2 in their Bibles. Read or have a student read verses 1-11. Say something like:

- **These verses give a description of Christ's attitude and instruct His followers to have this same attitude. What is one word that can be used to summarize this attitude?**
 - Answer: Humility (showing tenderness and compassion, considering others first).
- **Why does our attitude matter when resolving conflict?**
 - Answer: If we go into this process with an attitude of pride instead of humility, true godly reconciliation will never occur.

THEN, create a list on the large paper with your students. Say something like:

- **The first step to experiencing resolving conflict is making sure we have a proper attitude.**

Begin the list by writing "1. Attitude of Christ=Humility" on the paper. Then, have students recall the discussion and complete the list with something like:

2. Approach one-on-one
3. Include one or two others
4. Bring it to the church
5. Separate yourself
6. Maintain attitude of grace and forgiveness

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NEXT, say something like:

- **This list is one that comes from Christ. It isn't something we sat together and made up. If we want to live as Christ-followers and live our lives as He did, then we must follow His instructions. Will you commit to handle future conflict this way?**

FINALLY, allow students to reflect on this. Challenge them to take this seriously, as odd as it may sound from a worldly perspective. Encourage any feedback or questions. Then close in prayer.

- **Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're printing them, have them available for students as you wrap up class. If you're texting a link, posting them on Facebook, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.**
- **Use the Social Media guide to stay in touch with students via text or Twitter, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions and with being mindful of the choices they make during the week.**

We Want To Hear From You . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at **feedback@youthministry360.com**.