



Conflict

Overcoming stress in relationships...

(A 4 week video-driven bible study created by Bluefish TV and the nationally known youth pastor of Saddleback Church, Doug Fields. Edited by Woodridge Church.)

In this 4-week study, you will take a look at the sources of conflict many teenagers experience and help them learn how to respond to the conflict in their lives in a way that honors God.

“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

- Jesus (Mt. 5:44)

Conflict: With Family

Sara Norton's Blog (some thoughts to help you lead this conversation with your students)

If you're anything like me, you can think back to your teenage years and remember far too many times that you lost your temper with your parents or siblings. I am embarrassed to think about all the instances I yelled at my mom, attempted to beat up my brothers (but always came up on the losing end!), and intentionally stomped up the stairs and slammed my bedroom door to feel like I got the final word after an argument with my dad.

It seems like the easiest place for conflict to arise is at home, and it arises all the time when we're teenagers. Developmentally, teenagers are still in the stage of learning to be others-centered, and this means that most of the time they are primarily focused on how things affect them, how they feel, what they "know" is right, or what they want.

Although being self-focused as a teenager is a developmentally normal place to be, it is one of the primary factors in the conflict teenagers experience in their lives...especially with their parents. In the film you will watch tonight, youth pastor, Doug Fields, will talk about how that selfishness at the core of conflict. He will discuss James 4:1-2 which reads, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God." Additionally, Doug will talk about the way God calls us to honor our father and mother, and he will suggest tactics students can use to handle conflict with their families in a way that honors God.

Three students will share their testimony about the conflict they have experienced at home in tonight's clip. But think back to your own experiences with conflict and be ready to share what God has taught you about preventing and resolving it. Without a doubt, each and every student can relate to this topic and learn a little something. As you dive into the lesson this week, challenge them in the role they play in conflict they have with their family members and the power they have to handle it in a healthy way.

(Note: some Scripture passages you can encourage your student with during the week or after you do this lesson are: James 4:1-2; Eph. 6:1-9; 1 Thes. 5:12-18; 1 Peter 2:12-21; Galatians 6:7-10; Romans 12:9-12; Colossians 3:13-17)

GOAL: (everyone's will be a little different, write yours here to remind you of what you are leading your group toward)

INTRODUCTION: Over the next 4 weeks, we're going to look at different kinds of conflict we experience in our everyday lives and how God wants us to handle conflict. We're going to start off the series tonight by discussing the conflict we experience with our family.

PRAYER: God, You are perfect and all-knowing, and You put us with our families for a reason. But if we're honest, it's hard to put up with them at times! Help us talk about conflict with our family in a real way tonight, and help us be open to learning how we can handle conflict with them in a way that honors You.

VIDEO/DISCUSSION: Watch Video (17 Minutes): Conflict with family, then discuss...

1. Of the different students interviewed in the video, was there anyone you especially connected with? Who? Why? (As a reminder, the students were: 1) Chris: played video games all the time and fought with his mom. 2) Carolyn: little brother died and now her parents are super protective of her. 3) Victoria: grew up pagan and her mom thinks she's always trying to convert her. 4) Joy: pastor's kid and got wrapped up in drugs.)
2. Did any of Doug Fields' insight/advice stand out to you?
3. (If your students are kind of quite and you need a few specific questions, try some of the following:)
 - Chris was the first student we saw. Why did he get in so many fights with his mom? Whose fault were the fights? What could Chris and his mom do to restore their relationship?
 - Carolyn's little brother passed away and now her parents are super protective. What can she do about her situation? (Doug Fields said that there is a lot of conflict between Carolyn and her mom, but not a lot of *communication*...)
 - Victoria was the girl who grew up pagan, but then became a Christian. What challenges did she face? Do you think she was wrong to talk about her faith with her mom?
 - Joy grew up doing the church thing, and then got wrapped up in drugs. Wouldn't you expect a church kid to have the moral strength to stay away from drugs? What was the turning point that brought Joy back to Jesus? (The Passion of the Christ film)

TRANSITION: Just like the students we saw in the video, we all experience conflict with our families...especially with our parents! Let's take a look at what Scripture has to say about handling conflict with our families.

SCRIPTURE: Turn to **Ephesians 6**. This is a section of guidance for different groups of people. The end of chapter 5 has instructions for husbands and wives. The beginning of chapter 6 speaks to children and parents. And then there are messages for masters and slaves. Let's start with the last messages.

Someone read Ephesians 6:5-8.

1. What are slaves asked to do, and how are they supposed to do it? (*Obey their masters, as if they were serving Christ, sincerely, wholeheartedly.*)
2. Does this surprise you? Does this mean God approves of slavery? (*No. The thought of one person owning another is just wrong. Unfortunately though, slavery was common in Jesus' day. This passage assumes there were masters and slaves, and it tells slaves how to behave if they find themselves under the authority of someone else.*)
3. Do you think this idea applies to non-slavery situations today? Why or why not? (*It might apply to any case where one person has authority over another – workers and bosses, students and teachers, even children and parents.*)
4. What if a boss or teacher or parent asks you to do something wrong? What would this passage say about that? (*Note that it talks about "doing the will of God," and doing "good."*)

Now let's go back to the beginning of the chapter. **Someone read verses 1-3.**

1. What does this tell children to do?
2. Is there a difference between obeying and honoring? (*Honor seems like a bigger word. Obeying is simply doing what they tell you. Honor involves bringing honor to them by doing what's right and honoring their wishes.*)
3. Why should you obey and honor your parents? (*It's right. And there's a two-fold promise: things will go well for you, and you will live long.*)

Someone read verse 4.

1. Do you think there's a reason this is just addressed to fathers? (*In that time, fathers were seen as the king of the home, so fathers were probably more likely to exasperate their kids.*)
2. What does it mean to "exasperate" someone? (*"to squeeze the hope out of".*)
3. Have you ever felt exasperated? By your parents? When? How? (*When someone says "you'll never amount to anything," they're squeezing hope out. When someone sets impossible standards and criticizes you for not reaching them, it's the same thing. They're exasperating you. There's no reason for you to keep trying if you think you'll never succeed.*)

TAKE AWAY: Each verse we looked at tonight deals with relationships in which one person has power over another. We understand everyone involved is imperfect. That includes your parents. It also includes you. When we're dealing with imperfect people, there's bound to be conflict, as we saw in the video. Look over Ephesians 6:1-9 and come up with 3 principles for dealing with conflict in your home. Write these down as your take away for tonight.

CLOSING PRAYER: God, we want to honor You in all we do, and that means honoring our parents...even when it's hard. Continue to show us how to handle conflict with our family when we need to, and keep us humble as we do so. Amen.

Conflict: With Friends

Sara Norton's Blog (some thoughts to help you lead this conversation with your students)

Friends. It seems like teenagers can't live with them and can't live without them. Girls can giggle like crazy when they're together, yet stab each other in the back when they're apart. Guys can be as bonded as brothers, yet competition and rivalry can sever them in an instant. The longer we journey with our students, the more we see how complex their friendships are and how quickly betrayal, rejection, hurt, and loss can creep in.

In the lesson tonight, Doug Fields will address the reality that "hurt people, hurt people." He explains that people who hurt others have typically been hurt themselves. Many of our students have been hurt in the past – by family, friends, siblings, strangers, and peers – and their typical response is to want to hurt these people in return. However, Doug challenges them to be radical people who take a stand to stop the cycle of revenge.

Each student is going to feel pain, hurt, and betrayal at some point in time...and it isn't bad for them to feel these things. It is normal. Jesus felt these emotions too! The important thing is how they choose to handle their emotions when they feel them. Instead of seeking revenge, God tells them to "Love and pray for [their] enemies" (Matthew 5:44) and "Bless those who persecute [them]" (Romans 12:14). Our students might think this seem impossible to do, but it is what they are called to as a follower of Christ. Instead of seeking revenge, God asks them to surrender their desire to get even. He asks them to step outside of the cycle of hurt and pain and let Him be in control of the situation.

Our students have a choice in the conflict they experience with their friends. They can choose to be part of making the problem worse, or they can choose to be part of making the problem better. Challenge them to be radical tonight. Challenge them to be part of the solution. Challenge them to surrender revenge as they grab ahold of their identity and acceptance in God. Challenge them to be friends who respond to others in a way that God wants them to.

[Note: Another point Doug touches upon in this lesson is the reality that we don't have to be friends with everyone, nor do we have to be someone's friend again after they have hurt us. It is true that God calls us to love all people, but there is a difference between loving people and being friends with people. Friendship is a decision to open up and let someone into your life, and letting someone in who has hurt you in a very bad way isn't always the best thing to do. This is a particularly important issue with female friendships, but guys also experience it a lot in romantic relationships. Remind your students that they can still love someone without being their friend...and not being friends with everyone is okay.]

GOAL: (everyone's will be a little different, write yours here to remind you of what you are leading your group toward)

INTRO ACTIVITY: How many of you prefer the color red to the color blue? How many prefer blue to red? (Leaders: this is a completely arbitrary thing. You want to create a silly "conflict" between two groups.) All those who prefer red stand on this side and all blue-lovers over here. We're going to fight it out verbally and determine once and for all which color is better. Red team, give me one reason why red is better! You have 5 seconds. Blue team, give me a reason why blue is better. (Leader: Go back and forth, and keep it moving. Keep score...whenever someone gives a really good reason, award a point. Whenever a team fails to come up with a reason in 5 seconds, the other team gets a point. You are the final arbiter of the score, and if some people get upset about the score...well, this is a lesson about conflict! After a certain time limit, or it begins to lag, call it quits and announce a winner. Say, "Today we're talking about conflict that arises among friends. Sometimes it's something as silly as red and blue, but it still hurts when someone you trust hurts you. Let's take a look at some examples.")

VIDEO/DISCUSSION: Watch Video (18 Minutes): Conflict with Friends, then discuss...

1. Did you connect with any of the students in the video? Has anything like that ever happened to you? How did it feel?
2. Doug Fields said, "No one wins with revenge." How is this statement true? (*There might be a temporary feeling that justice has been served, but this won't last. Revenge just serves to continue the conflict and tear people apart.*)
3. Doug said an interesting thing about Hayley's story. He said, "Forgive and forget" isn't really the best thing. "Forgiving has nothing to do with forgetting." What did he mean by that? Do you agree? (*If we try to pretend that we were never hurt, we'll fail. We'll just be fooling ourselves. When you forgive someone, you're acknowledging that he or she did you wrong, but you're deciding not to treat them badly.*)
4. Doug said, "The Bible never says we have to be friends with everyone." Did that surprise you? Do you agree? What kinds of people should you not be friends with?
5. Another interesting thing Doug said was, "Hurt people, hurt people." What did he mean by that? (*People who hurt others have typically been hurt by someone else.*) Have you ever been hurt by someone who was hurt? Have you ever hurt someone because you were hurt?

PRAYER/TRANSITION: God, thank you for friendship and acceptance we have with You. Thank you that we can trust You will never hurt or betray us. Tonight, teach us to handle the conflict we experience with our friends in a way that honors You. Amen.

SCRIPTURE:

Turn to **Romans 12:14-21**. Someone **read verse 14** again.

- What does it mean to "bless" and to "curse"? How do people bless and curse others today? (*Words we speak. When we bless someone, we say kind words to them, or we say good words about them. When we curse, we say unkind words to them or bad things about them.*)

Someone **read verses 15-16**.

- If you rejoice and mourn with others, does that make you a better friend? (*People like to be listened to. They like to be understood. Friends connect at an emotional level. So if you pay attention to the emotions of others, and share those emotions, they should appreciate that.*)
- What does it mean to "live in harmony?" Does this mean you like everyone?
- If you take Doug Field's suggestion to pray for the person who hurt you, isn't that being a little hypocritical? If you're still mad at them, how can you really, sincerely, ask God to bless them? (*That's the whole idea – to get your heart in the right place...You need to bring all of your feelings before God – the good, bad, and ugly. Ask God for the power to change your heart so that you will really want what's best for the other person.*)

Read verse 17-18: What happens when you repay evil for evil? Is it really possible to do what is right in the eyes of everyone? Is it possible to live at peace with everyone?

Read verse 19: According to this verse, why shouldn't we take revenge?

Read verse 20-21: What should we do instead of taking revenge? What affect will this have on others? What does the "coals of fire" reference mean? (*The general idea is that this is the most powerful way to get back at someone, better than if we used actual coals of fire. Our loving response will work to burn away their desire to hurt us – as a coal of fire burns away impurities.*)

TAKE AWAY: We went over A LOT tonight. What is one thing you will remember from tonight's lesson, and how are you going to let it affect your relationships with your friends?

CLOSING PRAYER: God, give us the strength to do what You ask us to do even when it's hard. Give us the strength to love people when they are unloving towards us. Give us the strength to bless our friends when they curse us. Be with us this week as we live for You. Amen.

Conflict: With Authority

Sara Norton's Blog (some thoughts to help you lead this conversation with your students)

Remember what it was like being a teenager? No one would listen to you because you were "just a kid". Teachers seemed to sluff off any legitimate push-back, questions, or comments you had in class. Coaches didn't like your confident attitude or any of your own thoughts on how to make your team the best it could be. You could voice your opinion, but it often wasn't taken too seriously.

Previous generations have grown up with the mentality that people in authority over them are to be respected. Today, many teenagers believe authority figures need to gain their respect before they give it. Respecting authority isn't something assumed; it is something that needs to be won.

Even though adults should win the respect of teenagers by treating them with respect, teenagers also need to learn how to come under the authority of people who are in positions of power over them. As Christ-followers, our students are called to respect the authority figures in their lives, even when it's hard to do so.

Your students might not agree with this. Submitting to authority figures they personally don't like will definitely be hard for them. However, Romans 13:1 says, "all authority is from God." Our students need to realize that defying the authority figures in their lives isn't what God wants for them, and that it also makes it more difficult for them to readily submit to God's authority.

In tonight's lesson, help your students realize that they can't always choose who is in authority over them, but they can choose how they respond to them. What kind of attitude do they have? How do they handle conflict with authority? Do they handle conflict in a way that respects those in positions of authority over them? Are they humble? Are they respectful?

Help them realize that the way they respond when they have conflict with authority is a sign of their character. Encourage your students to practice respect now, and remind them that respect is a sign of obedience and a right relationship with God!

GOAL: (everyone's will be a little different, write yours here to remind you of what you are leading your group toward)

INTRODUCTION: Raise your hand if you've ever had a hard time getting along with a teacher, a coach, a play instructor, a band or choir director, a principal?! Tonight we're talking about what it's like to have conflict with authority, and how God wants us to respond when we do.

PRAYER: God, we know all authority comes from You. Everyone who is in a position of power has been put there because You are okay with it. Teach us how to be people who handle conflict with authority in a way that honors You.

VIDEO/DISCUSSION: Watch Video (16 Minutes): Conflict with Authority, then discuss...

1. What stood out to you the most in the last interview with Alex and Brett Harris? What do you think about their idea for a "rebellion"?
2. In the first interview, Cameron, the guy who ran track, said, "they say that you should respect authority, but I feel like authority should gain my respect." Should we respect authority figures because they're right, or merely because they have authority? *(Tough question. Ideally, every teacher, boss, coach, and cop would be smart and sensitive, and an expert in their field. We would instantly trust them. But life isn't like that. People are imperfect, even leaders. Doug Fields suggested that God had put those leaders in place and so they deserve respect just because of that.)*
3. Beth had an interesting problem. When she tried to apologize, the teacher thought she was being sarcastic. Has that ever happened to you? What can you do or say when a teacher or coach is impossible to please? What approach do you usually take?
4. Doug said something about catching more flies with honey than vinegar. What did he mean by that? Do you agree? *(A sweet attitude will be more effective than a sour one.)*

TRANSITION: We've seen how some teenagers have experienced conflict with authority, and Doug's challenge to treat the people of authority in a way that honors God. Let's look at what the Bible says about respecting authority.

SCRIPTURE: Tonight we're going to take a look at three passages of Scripture: two written by a guy named Paul (Romans, & 1 Timothy), one written by the disciple Peter (1 Peter). But before we dive in, I want to give you some background info on what's going on during the time the authors wrote these books. Peter and Paul lived in the Roman Empire. That meant there was a hierarchy of leaders, with the emperor at the head of the government and various governors leading local regions. These rulers were generally worshipers of the traditional Roman gods; they weren't Christians at all. In fact, the Roman government was beginning to be wary of Christians. The emperor at the time when all these texts were written was Nero, who was a little crazy. The first big Roman persecution didn't start until the year 64 AD. The book of Romans was written before that time, and maybe Paul hoped that God would use Nero to do good things. But the other two Scriptures – 1 Timothy & 1 Peter – were written just around the time when Nero was launching a brutal persecution against Christians, arresting them and crucifying many. With that in mind, take a look at these Scriptures. We'll split up into small groups to read them. Jot down thoughts you have as you read them. Are there particular teachers, coaches, leaders that come to mind as you read? How is God challenging you to behave when you have conflict with them?

Have your students get in groups of 3 or 4 and look at the following passages: **Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:13-15.**

Ask them the questions associated with each passage before they begin reading so they know what to think and talk about as they read. Facilitate a discussion about each passage after they have had time to discuss it together.

Here are some facilitation questions:

Romans 13:1-7: Who are some people in your life you should honor and why? Who is someone you haven't been honoring? What can you do differently to start honoring them?

1 Timothy 2:1-2: Is there a difference between "requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving"? If so, what is it? What specifically will you be praying for as you remember your leaders?

1 Peter 2:13-15: What are some things that make it difficult to honor some of the people with authority in your life? How can you overcome these obstacles in order to honor them?

TAKE AWAY: It can be hard to honor authority and handle conflict with authority in a way that honors God. However, God doesn't ask us to do things we can't do. Look over the things you learned from tonight's Scripture passages to remind yourself how you can respect the in authority your life.

CLOSING PRAYER: God, we want to honor You in all we do. We want to reflect You to everyone we know. Help us respect our authority so they would see You in us. Amen.

Conflict: With God

Sara Norton's Blog (some thoughts to help you lead this conversation with your students)

Let's face it. Life with God is hard at times. Many people think it's supposed to be a smooth path that is paved with harmony and peace. However, one of the greatest (and most life-crashing) types of conflict we experience is conflict with God. Sometimes it is an outside circumstance that shakes our relationship with God – a hurricane, the death of a loved one, a broken heart, the loss of a job. Other times, it is the sin we entertain, the rebellion we choose to engage in, that severs the closeness and peace we once had with Him.

Regardless of what causes the conflict we experience with God, one thing is always certain: it is hard to move past the emotions we feel in the midst of it. Far too frequently we close up on God in the midst of conflict. We stop talking with Him because we're angry, or we feel like we can't be real with Him about what we're going through.

But, as Doug Fields says in tonight's video, it's okay to feel any and every emotion with God. We've all been hurt, and God wants to hear about our pain and struggles. God wants to hear what we're feeling – the good, the bad, and the ugly – even if what we're venting about is directed at Him. God is a big God and can handle our emotions. He is also all-knowing, which makes it silly to pretend like we can hide anything from Him.

Too often, we understand God through the negative experiences we have in life and with others. For example, if our friends don't forgive us, then God isn't forgiving; if our parents don't love us, then God doesn't love us either. People are imperfect, but they were made by a perfect God...who is faithful, whose love is unending, whose power is immeasurable, whose knowledge is unmatched, who will never hurt us, abandon us, or forget about us...even when we're experiencing conflict with Him. Remember that it's okay to vent to God. The book of Psalms is filled with example of people who were in conflict with God and weren't shy to tell Him about it! However, even in the midst of conflict, we need to choose to put our faith into action by believing the Truth about who God is (even if it doesn't seem real to us at the time).

Most likely, each one of your students has gone through something that created conflict with God in their lives: Why did God make my life so hard? Why couldn't God have made me more like so-and-so? Why did God allow my parents to get divorced? Give them the space to talk about the conflict they've experienced (or are experiencing) with God. But also remind them about the truth of who God is – His unconditional love, acceptance, forgiveness, and power – as they work to resolve the conflict they've experienced with Him.

GOAL: (everyone's will be a little different, write yours here to remind you of what you are leading your group toward)

INTRODUCTION: It's easy to think about the conflict we've had with friends, family, and authority. It's harder to realize that we have conflict with God too. Tonight, we're going to talk about what it's like when we experience conflict with God.

PRAYER: God, whenever we are going through something hard, we always turn to you. Teach us what to do when the conflict we're having it with You.

VIDEO/DISCUSSION: Watch Video (19 Minutes): Conflict with God, then discuss...

The video started with a guy who had an issue with pornography. He felt guilty about it, and he sensed it was keeping him apart from God. He found it was hard to conquer the addiction by himself.

1. Do you think he felt distant from God because God refused to forgive him? (*Nope. The problem is NOT that God refuses to forgive, but that we feel too guilty to ask for forgiveness.*)
2. Why is it important to get help from others when we're struggling with recurring issues? (*Others can hold us accountable. They can check in on us and support us through it.*)
3. Have you ever experienced a distance with God because of the sin? Have you ever been held accountable by someone? What was it like? Doug Fields said we have a "small view" of God's love.
4. What did he mean by that? (*He was referring to a conditional view of God's love. God's love is "not based on what you do or don't do. He loves you because He created you and His love endures forever."*)

Rachel felt conflict with God because she resented what was going on in her life.

5. When have you felt this way with God?

The disaster of Hurricane Katrina was a shock to Miles.

6. How did Miles deal with it? Is it common for teenagers to handle conflict this way? What would you have told Miles in this situation?

TRANSITION: It might be surprising to you, but conflict with God is pretty common among people in the Bible. Even a great leader like Moses had regular disagreements with the Lord.

SCRIPTURE:

Turn to Exodus 3. This is the famous story of the burning bush, where Moses encounters God. After getting his attention, God has a job for Moses.

Someone read verses 10-12.

1. What does God ask Moses to do? (*Bring His people out of Egypt.*)
2. How does Moses feel about that? (*Incapable.*) How does God respond to that? (*"I will be with you." And He gives Moses a promise that will be fulfilled when – not if – he succeeds.*)

You'd think this assurance would be convincing for Moses, but let's see how he reacts. **Someone ready verses 13-14.**

1. What's Moses problem now? (*He's worried the Israelites won't believe him.*)
2. If you were God, how would you be feeling about Moses right now?! How does God respond?

What does this situation between Moses and God teach us about having conflict with God?

Someone Read Psalm 13 and/or Ps 22:1-2. How is David talking to God in this Psalm? Is that okay? Have you ever talked to God like that? Why or why not? How does the Psalm 13 end (vs. 5-6)? Why you think it ends this way?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. What does this passage have to do with having conflict with God? What conflict was Paul having with God? Do you think Paul got the answer he was looking for?

TAKE AWAY: Even when we have no clue what God is doing, we can trust that He is there. He is still Lord of all. He invites us to argue with Him, as Moses did, and complain and challenge Him, like Paul did. It's that kind of relationship. We can speak our mind. But we also need to listen and keep our eyes open for what God is saying to us and how He is showing Himself to us.

1. What will you take away from tonight about experiencing conflict with God?

CLOSING PRAYER: God, thank you that we can be real with You. Thank you that we can vent to You, argue with You, and complain to You. Keep our hearts humble before you, and give us to strength to come to you when we have conflict with You. Amen.

