

CONFIDENCE IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT

Leader pages on pp. 138-141

THE POINT:
TRUST GOD WHEN
CONFLICT DISRUPTS
YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

GENESIS 13:5-11,14-18

⁵ Now Lot, who was traveling with Abram, also had flocks, herds, and tents. ⁶ But the land was unable to support them as long as they stayed together, for they had so many possessions that they could not stay together, ⁷ and there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. [At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land.] ⁸ So Abram said to Lot, "Please, let's not have quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, since we are relatives.

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⁹ Isn't the whole land before you? Separate from me: if you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will go to the left." ¹⁰ Lot looked out and saw that the entire plain of the Jordan as far as Zoar was well watered everywhere like the Lord's garden and the land of Egypt. [This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.] ¹¹ So Lot chose the entire plain of the Jordan for himself. Then Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other.

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¹⁴ After Lot had separated from him, the Lord said to Abram, "Look from the place where you are. Look north and south, east and west, ¹⁵ for I will give you and your offspring forever all the land that you see. ¹⁶ **I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust of the earth, then your offspring could be counted.** ¹⁷ Get up and walk around the land, through its length and width, for I will give it to you."¹⁸ So Abram moved his tent and went to live near the oaks of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord.

MEMORY VERSE

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KEYWORDS

Eastward (v. 11)—Lot's journey eastward has troubling implications. Other situations in which "east" is a destination include

Adam and Eve following their sin (3:24), Cain following his judgment (4:16), and sinful humanity prior to tower of Babylon (11:2).

HOW CAN TRUST IN GOD HELP US DURING CONFLICT?

For sailboats, tension is a good thing. The tension of the ropes in the hands of the sailors creates tension in the sails—which in turn creates tension between the sail and the wind. That tension moves the sailboat forward. This is a good form of tension.

Like sailing, we are always managing tensions in life. We deal with the tension of finances, news, politics, healthy habits, household tasks, and work expectations. Learning how to handle the tension in a way that honors Christ is our goal as believers.

But one of the most difficult tensions we must manage is relational tension, including the nationwide racial tension we're all experiencing. We can't escape it—and some of it ends up being hard to handle. The tension in some relationships may have been stirring like a steady current for a long time. Others suddenly came out of nowhere like a heavy gust of wind. So, let's take some cues from Abram to see how he navigated the waters of his relationships.

Confront Conflict Appropriately

// Genesis 13:5-8

As we saw in our last session, Abram displayed a lack of trust when he took his family to Egypt. Even so, during that sojourn, God allowed Abram to acquire flocks and herds (Gen. 12:16). When Abram left Egypt and returned to Canaan, he returned with a lot more than he left with—a whole lot more! And his nephew Lot apparently did as well.

Their collective wealth made traveling together extremely difficult. This created tension between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. It was a “turf war” type of conflict.

You can sense the tension heating up. As the leader of the large assembly, Abram had a choice: he could ignore the conflict, or he could confront it. Abram chose to confront it. Abram didn't run from the conflict; he had the courage to face it head on, and he did so by first thinking of his relationship with Lot who was his nephew.



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We face the same decision anytime conflict arises in our relationships. Do we ignore the issue or confront it? Let's keep moving toward unity because the tension and conflict is just not worth it. This is especially true in the church and with relationships among believers. We are to make "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). We cannot control the attitudes and actions of another individual or group, but we can control our own attitudes and actions. We must evaluate our role by asking: Am I doing my part to maintain peace and resolve the conflict?

Abram confronted the issue. When done correctly, confrontation can show the other person how much we care. It demonstrates how much the individual matters to us. This practice can prevent so much unnecessary conflict. The alternative approach of ignoring the issue does not solve anything. In fact, by ignoring a tiny issue, we allow it to fester and grow. Over time, you can discover a gigantic wall in a relationship that should never have built up in the first place.

WHAT ARE SOME EARLY STEPS WE CAN TAKE TO AVOID OR REDUCE CONFLICT?

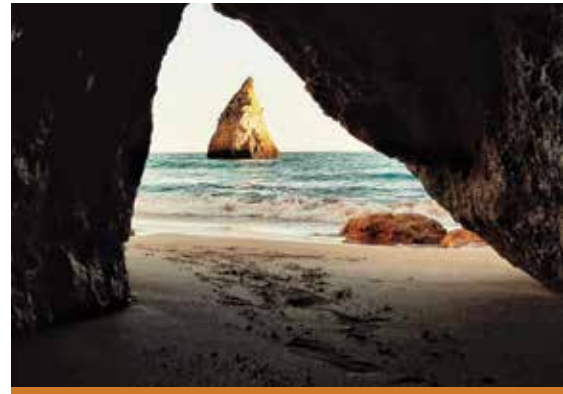
Consider the Needs of Others

// Genesis 13:9-11

Abram also lowered the temperature of the tension by walking into his conversation with Lot without the goal of winning the conversation. The goal in any conflict cannot be about who is right; it must be about making it right. In order to make things right, we must be willing to put the other person first.

By allowing Lot to choose land first, Abram demonstrated the importance of putting the needs of others before our own needs, a principle Paul spelled out centuries later. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). But let's be honest: putting the needs of others before our own doesn't always sit so well, especially in a conflict situation. It's easier said than done!

WHY IS HUMILITY A KEY WHEN SOLVING RELATIONAL TENSION?



DIGGING DEEPER LOT AND HIS DAUGHTERS

While the decision to part ways was necessary, Lot's life and direction completely changed after parting from Abram. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the death of his wife, Lot and his daughters fled to the caves near Zoar. Lot was afraid to live in the city, so he and his daughters just lived in the caves. His daughters, fearing they would never have children while living in the caves, got Lot drunk and both slept with him. Their resulting children became the forefathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites—both nations became enemies of Israel. A series of poor decisions stemming from conflict eventually produced people groups who were constantly in conflict with God's people.

How have you experienced consequences of past actions?



A humble attitude does not dismiss any wrong that may have been done to you, but remember the goal: The goal in any conflict cannot be about who is right; it must be about making it right. In order to make things right, we must be willing to put the other person first.

Consider the promise and position God gave to Abram. God had given this land to him! Abram did not have to make Lot such an offer. He could have told Lot to take the worst piece of property, and that still might have been viewed as gracious. After all, God had given the land to Abram, so Abram could've said, "It's time for you and your quarreling herdsmen to leave and get off my property." Keep in mind, Abram did not know Lot would choose land outside the promised land. Abram lowered the temperature of the tension by raising the level of his humility, not by allowing pride or his "rights" to control the situation.

Jesus was a far greater model of humility. Jesus willingly and gladly laid down His life for us, taking the death we deserve as His own. As Christ followers, we are to lean into His example and practice humility. Indeed, it's only possible to remain humble in Christ Jesus. The only way we can truly maintain humility in any conflict is to run our words and actions through the filter

of Jesus. This is a lesson we may have to learn every day, but it is a lesson—a principle—worth fighting for. When we do so, a lot of conflicts can be avoided altogether, and relationships can be restored.

Remain Confident in God's Provisions // Genesis 13:14-18

Tragically for Lot, he made a poor decision. He may have thought he was getting the better land—land that was well watered (Gen. 13:10). But his decision moved him away from his uncle, whom God had obviously blessed, and into a place of compromise. Notice Lot's downward progression. He chose land that was outside Canaan, the land promised to Abram. Lot "set up his tent near Sodom (v. 12), but later we find him "living in Sodom" (14:12), and finally we see him "sitting in Sodom's gateway" (19:1), a place where the city leaders sat. Lot eventually moved from being connected to Abram to being a leader in a wicked city.

Abram, however, maintained his trust in God. God reaffirmed His promise to Abram. He told Abram to open up his eyes and look around. All of the land, as far as his vision could see and beyond, would be given to Abram and his descendants. God reminded Abram of His promise—His unchanging, immutable promise.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LOT AND ABRAM?

Setting aside our own human viewpoint to see things from God's perspective can be difficult. That can be doubly difficult when things seem to be so far out of reach and a solution seems unimaginable—even when we hear Jesus' words, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

The situation between Abram and Lot was solved quickly, but what do we do when our

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own conflicts don't resolve so quickly? We trust God to work, and we trust Him to work in His timing. We typically want a quick resolution, but a resolution takes two parties. We may need to pray and ask God to work in the heart of the other person. We have to come to grips with the tension between God's timing and our timing. Trusting that His timing is better—His timing is perfect—can be difficult to swallow. We need to surrender our timing to His.

Reconciliation and forgiveness are not the same thing. We strive for both to take place, but reconciliation depends on the willingness of both parties to reconcile. While we can't control reconciliation, we can forgive. Forgiving another person can be hard—extremely hard—but it is the most healing thing to do. It takes two, but we can still forgive regardless of how the other person responds (Eph. 4:32). Forgive and trust God to work in the hearts of others. Trust that God will break through the walls and trust that the Holy Spirit to convict as we do our part to forgive and help manage the tension.

HOW CAN WE APPROACH CONFLICT IN A GODLY WAY?

DID YOU KNOW?

In the 1950s and 60s, the civil rights movement brought to the forefront of culture the disparity in legal rights for white and black Americans. Various forms of civil rights legislation were passed. Schools could no longer be segregated and discrimination in public places based on the color of one's skin was illegal. On August 28, 1963, a quarter of a million Americans marched in Washington, D.C. for Jobs and Freedom. Their voices were joined with other leaders in civil rights in an attempt to draw attention to stark racial differences in regard to basic civil rights. While some things did change, more than 60 years later, our country is still divided and racial tensions have escalated to new levels. Indeed, there is much work left to do.

How can all believers demonstrate trust in God in the midst of racial tensions that disrupt relationships?

LIVE IT

How can you trust that God will provide peace when conflict disrupts relationships?

God calls us to place the needs of others before our own. As humble as Abram was, Jesus is a far greater model of humility. Jesus willingly and gladly laid down His life for us, taking the death we deserve as His own. The only way we can truly maintain humility in any conflict is to run our words and actions through the filter of Jesus. Then the peace of God will abide as we deal with conflict.

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- **Pray about it.** Can others still see Christ in you during conflict? How well do you put others before yourself? Spend time this week praying over any unhealthy tendencies you have in times of conflict.
- **Resolve it.** Do you have a conflict that continues to have power over you? Pray, and then go to that person if possible. Ask God to help you place this person's needs above your own.
- **Give it to God.** Remember that God will fight for you. Trust that if the Lord has something for you, He will provide it. Take time this week to relinquish control or anger over anything you've been fighting for.

DAILY READINGS

1. CAN'T WE JUST GET ALONG // GENESIS 13:8

Abram was willing to do crazy things just to avoid conflict within the family. Abram said, "Let's not have quarreling." And then he says to Lot, "for we are close relatives." Abram put his nephew before himself and allowed Lot to have first choice of the land. That is a serious demonstration of putting the interests of others before your own (Phil. 2:4). It seems like relationships within a family can magnify conflict sometimes. Who in your family do you tend to have the most conflict with? Pray that God will guide you to resolve conflict in a way that honors Him.

Choose to safeguard the precious love and unity you have with your loved ones and with fellow believers.

2. DO EVERYTHING IN LOVE // 1 CORINTHIANS 16:13-14

As believers, we know in our minds that we are to put the needs of others before our own. But then real life happens and we discover how hard it can be to actually do that. The apostle Paul challenged believers with practical things we can all do to nurture unity and model a Christ-like attitude. In 1 Corinthians 16:14, he encouraged believers to be watchful for threats that can pull people apart. Then he summed it up by challenging us to do everything in love. Even when others don't respond in love, as Christ's followers we are to demonstrate love.

So watch for threats against unity and pray that God will help you respond in love if you are caught up in a conflict.

3. BLESSED BY GOD // GENESIS 13:14-15

So, Abram gave Lot the first choice of land—and, of course, he chose the best land. But that wasn't the end of the story. God blessed Abram because he had sought to avoid conflict with Lot. Abram recognized conflict would not make him a good witness to others who followed God. When we respond in a way that pleases God, we are also

blessed. We may not end up with all the land we can see, but we are blessed with the knowledge that we have honored God and we have honored others. That is a good feeling to have.

Trust God to remain faithful to keep His promises as you honor Him.

4. YOU CAN'T TRUST YOURSELF // PROVERBS 3:5-7

We've all experienced the disappointment of making plans only to have them fall apart. Or we think we have things figured out only to find out we really don't. King Solomon had tried all sorts of things to find answers, meaning, and pleasures in life—as evidenced in the Book of Ecclesiastes. What he discovered he wrote in these verses. Rather than trusting in yourself, trust in the Lord with all your heart. What can we, who are finite beings, do that a great infinite God can do? God's is strong enough to bear the weight of anything we are going through. Just trust and lean on Him.

When has leaning on your own understanding caused a problem for you?

5. THE WAY ISN'T CLEAR // JOSHUA 1:9

Escape rooms are very popular today. You and a group of friends are "trapped" inside a room and you have to use clues to solve puzzles and unlock the door to the room to escape. Sometimes you get out and sometimes you don't. Often the clues are just too hard to figure out. Life can feel like an escape room sometimes when you don't know what to do or which way to go. But you don't need to solve an elaborate clue to find direction in life. God reminded Joshua to be strong and remember God was with Him. Abram lived this out. When God told him to go, he trusted God and left his home, even though the way was not clear. You can trust God to provide the direction you need.

Thank God for His guidance and protection in your life.



My Notes

Name

Email

Session Number

Answer 4 Questions

What did You learn?

What Is God saying to you?

What are you gonna do about it?

**Do you have any questions
about the reading?**





My Notes

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