



Getting Started

Why can't we all get along?

It feels like the amount of anger and intolerance in the world increases each day. Having civil conversations about politics, religion, race, or any other controversial topic seems to be impossible. Instead, the world operates in echo chambers where people only talk with those who share their views and criticize the "other side."

If the teachings of Jesus point the way, then the Church should be the model for how people can love one another – even when they disagree.

But the teachings of Jesus aren't for the faint-of-heart. Jesus calls people to not just tolerate, but love their enemies and forgive. And keep forgiving. And forgive some more.

Martin Luther King, Jr., in a sermon from the Montgomery County jail, wrote:

"Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory."

From the book *Strength to Love*

"People will forget what you said; they will forget what you did; but they will never forget how you made them feel."

Maya Angelo

"We should defend ourselves. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

"Very good. And that way, the whole world will be blind and toothless."

Fiddler on the Roof

Choose One

What is a belief you would be willing to die for, if any?

What do you most fear in having a conversation filled with conflict?

What allows you to be at your best when you are in conflict with others?

What do you think are the greatest factors impacting our ability to engage in civil dialogue?



Turning the Other Cheek – Really?

Jesus addresses many situations in scripture that are rife with conflict. In some cases he is challenging the system or individual in power. In some cases he is comforting or challenging the victim of the situation. When wrestling with these passages, it is important to be aware of the context and audience, both the ancient audience and the folks across the room in a Bible discussion.

12 "...in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." **Matthew 7:12, NIV**

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Matthew 7:3-5, NIV

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

Matthew 5:38-42, NIV

See Also **Matthew 18:21-35, NIV**

32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, "you wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you implored me! Should you not also have shown mercy to your fellow slave as I also showed you mercy?"

John 8

6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Matthew 10

14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. 15 "Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town."

Mark 5

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis[b] how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Choose one

Share a time you were forgiven.

When have you turned the other cheek and forgiven others?

Have you had the experience of "shaking the dust off your sandals?" If so, how has it affected you or changed your view of the world?

Have you returned to a community or person and reconciled even if it (they) had excluded you unfairly?



Going Deeper

Henri Nouwen challenged himself and other Christians:

"God, help me to see others not as my enemies or as ungodly but rather as thirsty people. And give me the courage and compassion to offer your Living Water, which alone quenches deep thirst."

Choose One

What are some of the practices that you use to be the person you want to be in these kinds of conversations?

Think of someone diametrically opposed to your viewpoint. What if you thought of them as Nouwen does?

Is it ever okay to hate the other person? If so, when? If not, what emotion should be at play?

The Journey Ahead

In your next tough conversation, listen for what the other person needs. Consider including the needs or the person in your next prayer[s].

Find someone with a strong opposite viewpoint from yours. Together, practice how you have the conversation. Would the other person describe you with the Fruit of the Spirit?*

Think of a morally reprehensible enemy. Try talking to God about them.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23, NIV

To Learn More



Guidance:

Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time by Susan Scott

Crucial Conversations by Kerry Patterson and Joseph Grenny

Perspective:

Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No, to Take Control of Your Life by Henry Cloud and John Townsend



Guidance:

Dealing with conflict avoiders and seekers by Amy Gallo
<https://hbr.org/ideacast/2017/04/dealing-with-conflict-avoiders-and-seekers>



Guidance

Conflict—Use it, don't defuse it. TedTalk by CrisMarie Campbell and Susan Clarke
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o97fVGTjE4w>

Perspective:

Learn how to resolve conflict and restore relationships by Rick Warren
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1udN6OShf4>