

# Introduction to Biblical Counseling

## What are Four Keys to Working through Conflict? (Circles of Responsibility)

**Key Words: Identify, Assign, Assume, Fulfill**

### INTRODUCTION:

**A. Many new believers are surprised that they still have conflict after they become Christians. Even long term believers are surprised and discouraged.**

**B. God acknowledges that believers will have conflict.**

1. We experience conflict (trials) in circumstances which can include people.
  - a. James 1:2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials..."
2. We all experience conflict with people.
  - a. Conflicts with our spouse in marriage.
    - 1) I Peter 3:8-9, After Peter addresses wives' and husbands' responsibilities, he then states, "To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing."
      - a) Peter and most all the other disciples were married.
      - b) I Cor. 9:5, "Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?"
    - 2) Col. 3:19, Paul acknowledges Christian spouses can get bitter as a result of conflict. "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them."
      - a) Bitterness is the house that anger built.
  - b. Conflicts with your children and children with their parents.
    - 1) Col. 3:21, "Fathers, do not exasperate (stimulate to anger) your children, that they may not lose heart" (controlling, favoritism, criticism, perfectionism).

2) Eph. 6:4, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

c. Conflicts in ministry/work in church and religious organizations.

1) Phil. 4:2-3, “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. 3) Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

2) Acts 15:36-40 (Paul had a conflict with Barnabas over John Mark)

3) I Tim. 1:3-5 (Conflicts among church leaders)

4) I Cor. 6:1-2, 5 (Believers suing each other)

5) The New Testament is full of people in conflict.

Project: Have the group briefly write out a major conflict that involved at least two people. This is an important assignment. They will be asked to apply the following information to determine what can or cannot be done. Ask them to keep the assignment handy in order to write down next to it helpful insights that would help work that conflict through to a healthy conclusion.

**C. (But) Nothing can make you feel more helpless than a conflict in an important relationship that appears irreconcilable // (spouse, kids, parents, in-laws, relatives, church, school, ministry).**

**D. Realize conflicts reveal needs to grow in or demonstrate Christ likeness. // Most conflicts are over how to get a need met whether that need is real or imagined, legitimate or illegitimate.**

Ask the group what past events they have observed personally in people’s lives (or their own) that still affects present relationships.

**E. (But) The good news is untangling inter-personal conflict may not be easy, but it is possible. // It can be like untangling spaghetti.**

**F. The number one question people ask when discussing a difficult situation (conflict) is “What can I do?” // Why do they ask that? Because what they may be doing has not worked for them up to that point and they do not know what to do next.**

1. Prov. 14:12, “There is a way *that seems* right to a man, but its end *is* the way of death” (physical, spiritual and relational death).

2. Prov. 12:15, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes."

What are some wrong patterns of life you have observed in people who define themselves as Christians and may even be actively involved in their church? What observable results have you noticed? What do you suppose they were thinking when they acted out this wrong pattern in word, action or attitude?

**G. There is a Biblical principle that will help you answer two of the most difficult questions asked in a conflict; 1) What can be done? 2) Who should do it, in order to bring closure to the conflict?**

1. God established the principle of personal responsibility in the Garden of Eden.
  - a. Genesis 2:16,17, "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."
  - b. God defined the three characteristics of adulthood; choice, responsibility and consequence.
2. The Apostle Paul referred to this principle of personal responsibility in his letter to the Roman church.
  - a. Rom. 12:18, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."
    - 1) Usually change has to start within a person taking responsibility for himself and not in change in circumstance.
3. The first problem they had in the new church was worked through by using this tool (Acts 6:1-6).

**H. What are four things you can do to either restore a relationship or bring peace to yourself in an irreconcilable relationship?**

1. Identify what actually happened or is happening.
2. Assign responsibility for all the parts of the conflict.
3. Assume responsibility for the assigned parts (own them).
4. Fulfill what is in your circle of responsibility.

## IDENTIFY

- I. (Identify) Honestly identify what happened (or is happening) in the relationship or conflict. // At this point you are only gathering the facts. This is usually the very first place counseling can begin to fail.**

Ask the group to share from their own personal experience why gathering the facts (truth) was important.  
 What happened when they did this?  
 What happened when they failed to do this?

**A. God only gives grace (direction) for the truth (reality; not lying or denial). //Why is truth important?**

1. Jesus based His very relational ministry on grace and truth and still experienced conflict with His disciples.
  - a. John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth" (not just grace, not just truth).
  - b. Matt. 2:6-16, Disciples' negative reaction to a woman pouring expensive ointment on Jesus' head.
2. God desires truth to come from our innermost being.
  - a. Ps. 51:6, "Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts."
3. Truth is usually the first casualty of conflict.
4. But the brain is self protective against pain so it keeps pushing down any painful thought or emotion (guilt, shame, fear, rejection, etc.).
  - a. These are called "defense mechanisms." The mind has at least 40 ways to protect itself from pain emotionally.
  - b. Dr. Paul Meier states, "It is no exaggeration to say that understanding how to deal with defense mechanisms is what psychology and psychiatry are all about." (Meier p.103)

**B. (That's the reason) God never gives grace (power, energy, favor) for denial //or ignoring reality or the obvious.**

Christian Denial  
 "Denying God access to a hurt (conflict)  
 that He wants to heal for your benefit and His glory."  
 CML

1. Rev. 3:17, "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know (denial) that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."
2. "You can only heal what you acknowledge." "You can't heal it if you don't feel it."

- Denial prevents us from ever feeling better or having a better relationship.

**C. Confession brings glory to God.**

- Joshua 7:19, "Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide *it* from me."

**D. Remember, your focus at this point is fact finding, not fault finding. //If you start assigning responsibility here, people will shut down and stop telling you what actually happened. You are looking for the ways they communicate, behavioral patterns and attitudes but not who is doing them at this time. That is in the next step.**

- Prov. 14:15, "The naïve (simple, gullible) believes everything, but the prudent (wise) man considers his steps (thinks before he acts)."
- Prov. 18:13, "He who answers a matter (issue) before he hears it, it is folly (foolish) and shame (shameful) to him."
- Prov. 29:20, "Do you see a man hasty (quick) in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him."

**E. There are at least four reasons (obstacles) believers may not want to look at the truth in themselves or the conflict. It is a big source of anxiety.**



Fear of reality  
Fear of re-feeling  
Fear of responsibility  
Fear of motives

From your own experience what difficulty have you had in discovering the truth (facts) in a conflict? What have you found that works? What have you learned that does not work?

**REALITY**

- A reality (truth) we do not want to acknowledge or admit.
  - Molested by a relative or others.
  - The husband or wife may be in adultery, an emotional affair or pornography.
  - A spouse may be an alcoholic or on drugs.

- d. A couple may be living together without being married (John 4:18 woman at the well).
- e. They may be in an addictive relationship. Co-dependent, relationship addiction.
- f. There may be physical/emotional abuse which is minimized to avoid rejection or abandonment.
  - 1) Good book, *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship* by Leslie Vernick.
- g. It may be hard to admit you are just being used or using someone else.
- h. One may be engaged to marry an unsaved person (II Cor. 6:14).
- i. One may not be walking with God and is backslidden.
- j. There may be eating disorders or other hidden addictions.
- k. Someone in the relationship is a lesbian or homosexual.
- l. There may be the fear of discovery that they are not that perfect parent, kid or spouse.
  - 1) Most cultures are designed to put up a front to hide their real selves.
- m. Someone may be critical, judgmental, a gossip, controller, irresponsible or perfectionist

What reality or truth would you add to this list that can't be admitted?

## FEELINGS

- 2. Feelings we do not want to re-feel. // Facts bring up feelings they may not want to feel or acknowledge because then they will have to feel the emotional pain of those facts.

What kinds of feelings would a person not want to feel?  
Where would you guess those feelings are coming from?

- a. Negative feelings are hard to re-experience. "I don't want to go there." Fear of feeling.
  - 1) "I'm not wanted."
  - 2) "I'm not loved" or "loveable."

- 3) "I can't do anything right." (failure)
  - 4) Shame – efforts made to save face. All addictions are shame-based.
  - 5) Guilt
  - 6) Fear
  - 7) Feelings of inadequacy
  - 8) Rejection
  - 9) Inferior
- b. Amber did not want to acknowledge her grandfather who molested her because she was afraid she would hate him.

## RESPONSIBILITY

3. Responsibility we do not want to assume.

What responsibility do you believe they would want to avoid?  
Why would they want to avoid or refuse to fulfill those responsibilities?

- a. There may be a need to forgive and refrain from taking revenge.
  - 1) Rom. 12:19, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."
- b. One may have to start accepting someone they have been rejecting.
  - 1) Jews had to accept Gentiles into the church (Acts 10,11).
- c. There may be a need to love someone who is not lovable.
  - 1) Matt. 5:43, 44, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, 'love your enemies...'"
- d. One may have to admit he was wrong and confess that as wrong to those involved. He may have to say, "I was wrong,"
  - 1) I John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- e. There may be a need to make restitution or rebuild trust.

- 1) Matt. 5:23-24, "Therefore if you are presenting your (sacrificial) offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."
- f. One may need to confront an issue or person (mom, dad, husband, wife, brother, sister, uncle). Some cultures do not like to confront. In other cultures any and all excuses are to be accepted, even if they are lies.
    - 1) A son on drugs needs to get treatment or he is asked to leave the house.
    - 2) There may be a need to make a clean cut from pornography (sex with photo harlots) and get help.
    - 3) One may be inflicting emotional and/or physical abuse and needs to stop it.
    - 4) May need to end an emotional or physical affair.
    - 5) Remember, enablers are disablers too.
  - g. Assuming responsibility may call for a change you may have to make that could be scary.
  - h. There may be a need to establish a difficult boundary in the relationship (abusive relationship - spouse, parents).
  - i. There may be a need to break off an affair (physical or emotional).

What other responsibilities have you observed that people do not want to assume?

### **MOTIVES (of the heart)**

4. Motives of our heart (core belief system) we do not want to acknowledge (I Cor. 4:5).

What motives would a person want to hide by not looking at the truth in a conflict? Why would they want to hide it?

- a. One may be totally selfish and a user of people, narcissistic (self-centered), manipulator.
- b. Envious (angry others have what you want), the reason Jews killed Jesus.
  - 1) Psalm 73 (Asaph envies the wicked).

- 2) The Jews killed Jesus because they envied Him (Matt. 27:18).
- c. Covetous (I desire what you have).
  - 1) I Cor. 6:10 (listed among those who will not enter the kingdom.)
- d. Jealous (fear of being replaced)
- e. Pride

## Take an Honest X-ray

**F. Project: Take an honest x-ray of the relationship conflict with others. // List where you are, what is happening and where you want to be or what you want the corrected relationship to look like. Identify the fleshly tools we are using instead of spiritual tools of the spirit.**

1. Arbitrarily list behaviors, attitudes, words that are being exhibited now that are not working or are harmful.

### **At**

Angry  
Hurt  
Rejected  
Fearful  
Withdrawn  
Lying  
Unfaithful  
Critical  
Unloving  
Blaming  
Selfish  
Vengeful  
Unfulfilled expectations  
Denial

### **Be**

Forgiving  
Healed  
Accepted  
Trusting  
Communicative  
Truthful  
Faithful  
Positive  
Loving  
Accountable  
Giving  
Forgiving  
Balanced expectations  
Reality



2. Getting an honest x-ray (or MRI) of the conflict is not easy to do. One may need to get help in this clarifying process from a pastor, friend, or counselor.
  - a. I Cor. 6:5b, "Is there not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren?"
3. No doctor will perform surgery on a broken arm without first acquiring and studying the x-rays or results of tests.
4. There must also be a deep commitment to make a change from the heart based on the truth or reality.

5. In marriage issues, 60% of a solution is just to get agreement on what the problems (issues) are. Agreement could mean we are well on our way to a solution.

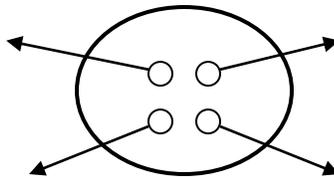
Ask the group to go back to the case study they wrote out earlier and have them add as much detail of the facts that they are able to recall. Ask them to develop as clear an x-ray as possible.

## ASSIGN

### II. Assign responsibility for all the parts of the conflict.

#### A. Draw a circle for each one involved in the conflict and list who is responsible for what. //Each person has his own circle of responsibility.

1. Initially it may appear that everyone is in one big circle and therefore, the whole thing looks complicated like a plate of spaghetti. But your task is to separate out all the circles that are currently combined into one.

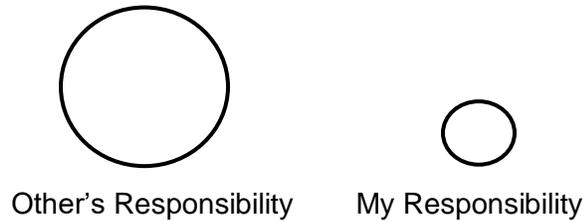


2. Apostle Paul described this concept to the church at Rome:
  - a. Rom. 12:18, "If possible, so far as it depends on you (in your sphere), be at peace with all men."
  - b. "Depends on you" or as much as is in your circle of responsibility.
3. Jesus addressed this same concept of circles of responsibility with the beam and speck analogy.
  - a. Matt. 7:5, "...first (step) take the beam (log) out of your own eye (your circle of responsibility) and then you will see clearly to take the speck (straw) out of your brother's eye" (his circle of responsibility).
    - 1) Notice, he did not say you could not help, but you first need to clear up your own perspective to see their perspective.

#### B. The idea of having your own circle of responsibility may be new thinking to you.

1. Some people feel the other person is either mostly or totally the responsible one. So they shrink their circle and inflate the other person's circle.

Drawing:



2. Projection: which is criticizing a fault, habit, or attitude in someone else when it's really an attitude, fault or habit in you.
3. Sometimes a person will shrink their responsibility in order to avoid the fear of failure and to avoid their personal responsibility.
4. But God is not as concerned with how big or how little your circle is but what you do with what is inside.

**C. We often hear that a problem is so complicated that it defies solution. //The answer is at least twofold:**

1. It may not be in our responsibility to correct it for at least four reasons. //Ask yourself, "Do I have the time, authority, ability or resources to help with this?"
  - a. Do I have the time to help this person or persons to work through this problem?
  - b. Do I have the authority (legal, medical, custody, divorce settlements) to help them work it out?
  - c. Do I have the ability (physical, emotional, spiritual training) necessary to help?
  - d. Do I have the resources (finances or things) to help them out?
    - 1) I John 3:17, "But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"
2. It may be that we have not determined who is responsible for what.

**D. Assign to each person (or yourself) what is legitimately in their circle of responsibility. // How? Ask, what words, actions and attitudes are legitimately in your circle of responsibility?**

1. This is the "tool" the apostles used to deal with the first conflict in the church (Acts 6:1-7).

**E. Areas to consider (roles and relationship defined in scripture and what has been mutually agreed to; job description, policies.)**

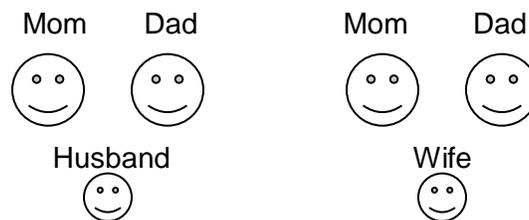
1. Parents and children
  - a. Parents (Eph. 6:4; Col 3:21)

- 1) “Do not provoke (stimulate) your children to anger” by unreasonable demands, petty rules, favoritism, criticism, perfectionism, too busy, etc.
- 2) “Bring them up (rear, nourish, provide for physical and spiritual needs) in the training (discipling, correcting, directing) in righteousness and admonition (or instruction) of the Lord. Focus on discipleship, not discipline.

b. Children (Eph. 6:1-3)

- 1) “Children” is young children, not adult children.
  - 2) Obey because it is right, it is a proper course to follow in Christ.
  - 3) “First commandment” in primary importance to children.
  - 4) Benefit of obedience: a prosperous and long life because of the character it develops; self discipline resulting in stability and longevity.
2. Wives, respect and admire (Eph. 5:22-29; I Pet. 3:1-6); husbands, love and cherish (Eph. 5:25-31; I Pet. 3:7).
  3. In-laws (Eph. 5:31; Matt. 10:34-37)

a. Marriage creates new family circles of responsibility and roles.

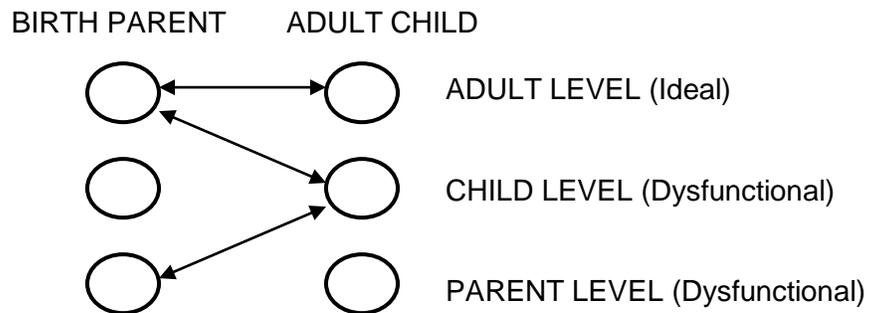


- 1) Parents have a hard time to stop controlling.
  - 2) Children have a hard time to stop depending on their parents instead of God.
- b. In-laws are to be honored for life but not obeyed for life. Honor is an attitude of the heart, not obedience to their commands. If a wife is still “obeying” her mother and submitting to her husband, she is living with a two headed monster. In-laws no longer have any say in their adult children’s lives. They are directly responsible to God, not parents (Gen. 1:24).
- 1) The Greek word in Eph. 6:1 refers to “young” children; not those who are fully grown.
- c. In-laws are responsible for their own happiness, acceptance and emotional maturity, not their grown children.

1) If one parent calls daily and makes you her only close friend, it's time to cut the umbilical cord and reduce calls to ten minutes once or twice a week. Establish a new boundary with them.

d. Both groups are responsible to communicate adult-to-adult.

1) Most dysfunctional adult relationships may have one person talking parent-to-child and the other person responding child-to-adult. If they are both adults, they need to talk adult-to-adult with mutual respect. They will stand before God as adults whether they act like it or not (2 Cor. 5:10).



e. Identifying and establishing these circles of responsibility could also bring conflict. Jesus warned of this possibility.

1) Matt10:34-37, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; <sup>36</sup> and 'a man's enemies *will be* those of his *own* household.'<sup>1</sup> <sup>37</sup> He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

4. Children born outside of marriage

5. Ex-spouses

6. Blended families

7. Pastors, people (Heb.13:17; I Tim. 5:17-20), officers, pastors and leaders, lead by example and not lord their position over them. Do not dominate as in the rule of a strong person over one who is weak.

a. I Peter 5:1-4

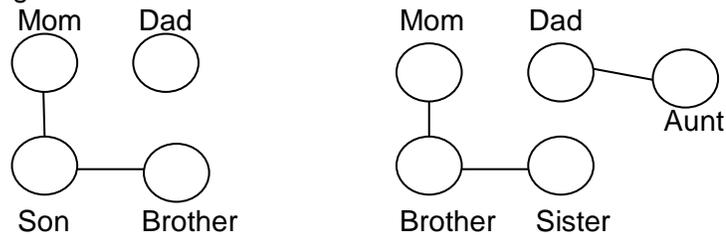
b. I Timothy 3:1-18

8. Parishioners

a. Obey and submit

- 1) Heb. 13:7, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."
- b. Rebuke publicly pastors and leaders who continue in sin (I Timothy 5:17-20).
9. Government officers (Rom.13:1-7), citizens (I Tim. 2:1-3)
10. God/man (Phil. 2:13, 13)
11. Immediate and extended families have their own circles of responsibility.

a. Drawing:



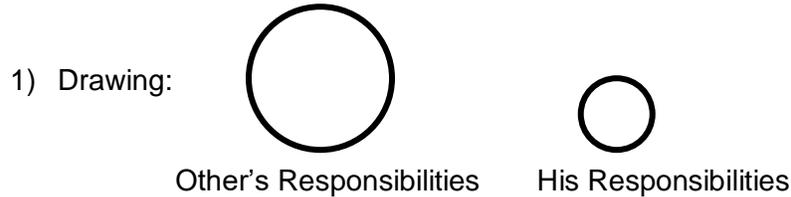
**F. Your circle may change from time to time over the years.**

1. Parent roles shift from parenting to mentor roles when their kids become adults.
2. Job changes may alter responsibilities.
3. Circumstances and age can change them as when one parent or spouse becomes disabled.
  - a. One parent has to take over when the other abandons the family.
  - b. Adult children have to take care of their aging parents.
  - c. A parent can die leaving the other parent to raise the children.
4. Jesus went through four stages in His own life as it related to His birth family.
  - a. He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51).
  - b. He was released from His parents (John 2:4).
  - c. He formed a new family (Mark 3:31-35).
  - d. He assumed responsibility for His mother's future care before he died (John 19:26, 27).
5. Project: Go through each of the areas listed above and write what is in each person or group's circle of responsibility. Then make note of what is wrongfully placed in any of those circles.

## G. Avoid two traps while assigning responsibility.

### 1. Blame shifting to avoid assuming your responsibilities.

- a. The blame shifter's goal is always to reduce his responsibility and to protect his pride and to avoid loss, shame or failure. He may attempt to increase the size of the other person's responsibility to avoid his or prevent personal failure.



- 2) Blame shifting takes the attention and responsibility off of him (to avoid guilt) and shifts it on to someone else.

- 3) Blame shifting is like seeing your dirty face in a mirror and then washing the mirror.

- b. Jesus rebuked Peter for attempting to take attention off himself and shift it to the Apostle John.

- 1) John 21:21-22, "Peter therefore seeing him (John) said to Jesus, 'Lord, and what about this man?' <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to him, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? (That is in my circle of responsibility.) You follow me.'" (That is your circle of responsibility.)

- c. The blame shifting pattern is not new. Adam did this with God regarding his responsibility for his sin in the Garden of Eden when he and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit.

- 1) Gen. 3:12, "The man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.'"

- 2) Adam blamed God, (You gave me) then he blamed her (she gave me).

- 3) Eve blamed the snake (Gen. 3:13).

### 2. Blame taking to gain acceptance peace and to avoid guilt or shame.

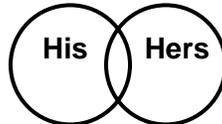
- a. The person assumes other's responsibilities to get someone to like or to accept them or to gain peace at any personal cost. This kind of peace is temporary.

- b. Women tend to take the blame in order to be able to fix the relationship or to reduce tension in the environment.

- 1) Abigail tried to take responsibility for her husband's sin to prevent David from killing her whole household (I Sam. 25:24).

- 2) Moses asked God to blot out his name if he did not forgive Israel for making the golden calf idol.
  - 3) Paul could wish he could be accused and cut off from Christ for the sake (salvation) of his fellow Jews (Rom. 9:1-4).
- c. Blame takers often enable others to be or continue to be irresponsible so that they become disabled.

**H. Understand in many situations there are shared responsibilities.**



**Shared Responsibilities**

Now have the group go over their case study. Have them assign to each person mentioned what is in each one's circle of responsibility. Have the group share each problem and how they assigned responsibility. Then have them ask each other if a responsibility was wrongly placed, or if one should be added to a particular circle.

## **ASSUME**

**III. Assume responsibility that is legitimately yours. //Assigning and assuming are two separate things. You can tell a kid to clean up his room (assign) but he may not assume the responsibility (and clean the room).**

**A. Get a commitment to assume responsibility and make it unconditional.**

1. Here is a big source of failure because there was not a firm commitment to assume full responsibility for what was assigned. They must put their stuff in their circle of responsibility and own it.

**B. Only assume what is in your circle of responsibility before the Lord.**

1. Josh. 24:15, "As for me and my house we will serve (assume responsibility to) the Lord."
2. This is hard if you are a fixer, rescuer, controller, if you have a fear of abandonment, or are emotionally dependent. These persons find it very easy to assume responsibility for others' behavior and feelings.

**C. Respectfully reject what is not your responsibility. //The apostles did this in Acts 6:1-6. They were able to say, 'No' because they knew what their primary responsibility was. Pastors who do everything and cannot delegate or say, "No", are failing to fulfill their ultimate responsibility.**

1. In a respectful tone of voice state, "This is not my circle of responsibility."
  - a. "You owe no one an explanation about why you will not do something that is not your responsibility" (Boundaries, p. 197). Doing so could start an argument. Two exceptions may be your spouse or boss.
2. An angry response can be a signal of blame shifting or of a failure to be willing to assume legitimate assigned responsibility.
  - a. Cain shifted blame away from himself when God confronted him about his brother's murder.
    - 1) Gen. 4:9, "Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Able your brother?' And he said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'" Is it my responsibility to know where my brother is?

**D. Remember, God only gives you grace, power, wisdom and direction for what is in your circle // (as a general rule) (Phil. 4:13).**

**E. Realize God also has a circle of responsibility. //God's circle is usually not considered in most conflicts. It is in His circle to do at least the following five things:**

1. Convict - John 16:8, "And He, when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."
2. Change - Phil. 2:13, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."
  - a. It is never your ultimate responsibility to change anyone. You can urge, influence, appeal, which is like sowing and watering seed. But as with salvation, God is ultimately responsible for the change (I Cor. 3:6).
3. Control - Gal. 5:23, Self-control is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
  - a. God does not give you power to ultimately control people, places or things; only yourself.
  - b. Controllers attempt to keep everything and everyone in their circle of responsibility.
4. Give wisdom - James 1:5; 3:15-17
  - a. Warning: You may not want God's wisdom when you read the characteristics of His wisdom.
    - 1) His wisdom is pure and without hypocrisy. He will not give you direction to enable you to be selfish.

5. Take revenge - Rom. 12:19, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

**F. Resist assuming other's responsibilities to accomplish the following six things:**

1. To make peace // this only postpones the war.
2. To avoid guilt feelings // which only return later.
3. To maintain a childish perspective //an adult who relates as a child-to-parent rather than as an adult-to-adult.
4. To gain acceptance // enough is never enough.
5. To avoid rejection // it will only come in another form.
6. To please // your performance is never enough.

**G. Assuming legitimate responsibility can be painful to your pride. //especially when there has been a past habit of blame shifting to others.**

1. God expects you to assume your responsibility for your words, actions and attitudes and act on them.
  - a. Matt. 5:23, 24, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."
  - b. Note: He is apparently waiting for the offended one to come to him.
2. Often God will reveal our responsibility while reading His Word or in prayer but we tend to slip into selective amnesia and move on ignoring the responsibility that was assigned and we need to assume.
  - a. James 1:14, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."

**H. Assuming your responsibility before God increases your feelings of being favored (grace) by God because it is humbling to admit responsibility.**

1. I Peter 5:5b, "God is opposed to the proud (rejects responsibility) and gives grace (favor, value) to the humble" (who assume responsibility).

**I. God assures us that His load for us is light.**

1. Matt. 11:29, 30, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

**J. General rule: do not do for others what they can fully do for themselves.**

1. Unnecessarily assuming other's responsibilities is usually self-protecting and can be a form of control.
2. It can temporarily protect you but it only postpones the pain of the conflict.
3. It can enable them to continue to be irresponsible.
4. Love gives a person what they need, not necessarily what they want.
5. Fear (of rejection, etc.) gives a person what he wants, not necessarily what he needs.

In their case study, who has failed to assume responsibility for their actions?  
 What do you believe is behind this failure?  
 What do you think it would take to have them assume their responsibility?

**FULFILL (Key to power)**

**IV. Fulfill your circle of responsibility. //Here is the heart of power and change; it's the power of personal responsibility.**

**A. The steps of identify, assign and assume, do not work without the final step of fulfilling your circle of responsibility.**

1. This is the primary step that makes counseling effective.

**B. God only benefits the "doers" of His Word, not the "knowers, studiers or listeners".**

1. James 1:22, 25, "Prove (demonstrate) yourselves doers (practitioners) of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude (lie to) themselves. <sup>25</sup>But one who looks intently at the perfect law,..and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer (fulfiller) this man shall be blessed in what he does."
2. Many people confuse listening with doing.
3. When someone says, "This counseling is not working" ask, "What have you been asked to do (assign, assume) and are you doing it?" You may need to modify your "things to do" list but usually the person(s) is not carrying through what they should do.
4. You have not failed if they do not fulfill their circle of responsibility.
  - a. Ill. Rich, young ruler (Matt. 19:16-22)

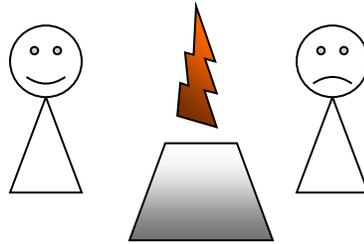
Ask the group to share experiences of sharing truth and people not following through or when they have had to modify their counsel.

**C. The benefits of being a doer (fulfiller) of what is in your circle of responsibility.**

1. Focus - It will give you something to focus on for direction.
  - a. "I know the next right thing to do."
2. Purpose - It will give you a purpose for life.
  - a. "I now have purpose in my life."
3. Accomplishment - It will give you a sense of accomplishment.
  - a. "I feel like I'm getting somewhere."
  - b. Eph. 6:13, "...having done all to stand."
  - c. Jesus cried out on the cross, "It is finished!"
  - d. II Tim. 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."
4. Security - It will give you a sense of security.
  - a. "I know this is what I should do!"
5. Peace - It will reduce anxiety.
  - a. "I don't have to wonder if I should be doing something else."
6. Calmness -It will reduce tension.
  - a. "I don't need to be in someone else's circle."
7. Harmony - It will reduce conflict.
  - a. "That's not my responsibility."
8. Healing - It will rebuild relationships.
  - a. "Now I'm free to have a relationship."
9. Witness - It will be a powerful witness.
  - a. "My life speaks louder than my words."
10. Contentment - It will give you a sense of well-being.
  - a. "I can be at peace within myself."

**D. (Hard) Realize people are going to be irreconcilable in the last days no matter what you do. // People will refuse to assume and fulfill what is in their circle of responsibility.**

1. The Apostle Paul made this sad reality clear to Timothy. People at the end of time will be characterized by:
  - a. II Tim 3:3 "...unloving, irreconcilable, malicious, gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good."
    - 1) This is the only use of the Greek word "irreconcilable" in the New Testament.
    - 2) It literally means "without libation or drink offering." The drink offering to be poured out on an altar was to seal a treaty between warring generals. But one general chose to not pour out the drink offering.



2. Know that God understands people will be irreconcilable is reassuring. The Apostle Paul illustrated this in a marriage where one of the mates was not a Christian and wanted to leave the marriage after the best efforts of the believer to save the marriage.
  - a. I Cor. 7:15, "Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace."
3. God's goal is peace and He has a special reward for those who help bring peace.
  - a. I Cor. 7:15b "God has called us to peace."
  - b. Matt. 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."
4. One means of achieving this goal of peace is by identifying, assigning, assuming and fulfilling our individual circles of responsibility. Failure to do this will also bring failure to the efforts of reconciliation and peace.

**E. Remember, you will only be judged by God for your own circle of responsibility.**

1. II Cor. 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

- a. I Cor. 3:11-13, “Gold, silver ....wood, hay, stubble....”
2. Romans 14:10b; 13, “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ...(and)...shall give account of himself to God.”
3. I Peter 4:17, “For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”

**F. It may seem unfair that only you are being the responsible one. // But that is better than no one. Yes, it is unfair, but life in a sin filled and fallen world is unfair.**

1. You can be well or at peace with or without the other person’s cooperation // because peace is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our life and is not dependant on anyone else or on circumstances (Gal. 5:22). That peace comes by submitting to Him and obeying Him.
  - a. You may experience sadness because of other’s failure to be responsible, but sadness is an appropriate emotional response for their failure.
  - b. Phil. 3:18, “For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.”
    - 1) You can help to reduce the tension by fulfilling your own circle of responsibility.

**G. Your task is to do what’s in your circle of responsibility, then having done all that you can do, to “stand.”**

1. Eph. 6:13, “Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

**V. Entrust (transfer) yourself over to God when the other person fails in their responsibility to you.**

**A. Jesus did not respond in kind to those who hurt Him and who failed to act responsibly.**

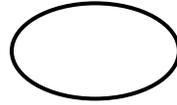
1. I Peter 2:23a, “And while being reviled (insulted, verbally abused), He did not revile in return; while suffering (pain, loss – physical abuse) He uttered no threats (of revenge).”

**B. Jesus was active, not passive, in His undeserved pain.**

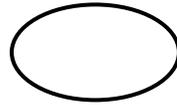
1. I Peter 2:23b, “But (Jesus) kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”
  - a. “Kept entrusting” means that He did not do it once and for all, but it was a continual process (imperfect verb) for Him.

- b. "Judges righteously" implies He (God) knows the truth, keeps the score and is more than fair in light of eternity. Jesus moved His case to a higher court where His Father was the Judge.

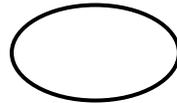
1) DRAWING:



**JUSTICE ON GOD'S LEVEL**



**INJUSTICE ON THE JEWISH LEADERS' LEVEL**



**INJUSTICE ON A PEER LEVEL**

- 2) Jesus went right through peers and Jewish leaders and appealed directly to God the Father.

**C. Dr. Timothy Jennings, M.D. "Trust God with your life and life's outcomes. Choose to fulfill your known responsibilities in harmony with a clear conscience and God's will and then, trust God with how things turn out. One of the greatest sources of worry and fear is trying to make life turn out the way we want ...rather than in trusting God with the outcome" (p.38).**

**VI. Forgive others for their failure to be responsible for their circle of responsibility.**

**A. Forgive means send them over to the "proper authority, the Lord Jesus." // The word literally means "to send away."**

1. Jesus forgave the Roman soldiers even though there was no behavioral change on their part.
  - a. Luke 2:34, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (helping Me provide salvation).
  - b. They did not know they had played into God's hand and plan. They meant it for evil but God meant it for good (Gen. 50:20).
2. Stephen forgave those who murdered Him.
  - a. Acts 7:60, "Lord do not hold this sin to their charge."
    - 1) God did lay it to their account anyway. It was Stephen's responsibility to ask God to forgive them. It is God's responsibility to respond to that request how He chooses to do so.
    - 2) He (Stephen) said this for his own benefit. Forgiveness is primarily for our benefit, not for the one being forgiven.

**B. (Hard part) Accept upon yourself the consequences of their failure (sin) to fulfill their responsibilities. //Then allow God to use their failure to bless you.**

1. You will only lose in time, not in eternity.

- a. Rom. 8:18, (The Apostle Paul speaking) “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

**VII. Conclusion: Usually it is not the complexity of a problem that is the issue; it is the failure to identify, assign, assume and fulfill responsibility that prevents the solution.**

Review your case study. Identify what really happened.  
 Assign responsibility for all the parts.  
 Now, how would you counsel the people involved?  
 What would you do differently?  
 How has this process helped you personally with any conflict you are a part of?

### **Ten Keys for Success**

1. Use conflict to reveal needs.
2. Use Scripture as your norm.
3. Identify the facts of the conflict.
4. Assign responsibility for the parts of the conflict.
5. Assume legitimate responsibility.
6. Fulfill your responsibility.
7. Trust God when others fail.
8. Forgive the irresponsible.
9. Accept the consequences.
10. Purpose to be responsible.

# Circles of Responsibility

## Small Group Questions

1. How have you been taught in the past to work through conflict with others? How has it worked for you? When did you come to a point in the conflict where you did not know what to do next?
2. In conflicts past or present, what difficulty have you had in discovering the truth and discussing the truth of the conflict?
3. Why do you think it is so difficult for people to assign legitimate responsibility to others for their part in the conflict?
4. What experiences have you had with talking with a person who constantly shifts blame off himself on to others?
5. What have you done when others attempted to place on you responsibility that is not yours?
6. On what occasions have you found yourself assuming a responsibility that belonged to God? What did you do when you realized it? When have you experienced others attempting to do what is in God's circle of responsibility? What was the result?
7. What has been the hardest responsibility you have had to assume? How painful was it for you to assume it?
8. How have you felt personally empowered when you did fulfill what was in your circle of responsibility?
9. What relationship have you restored or maintained by fulfilling what is in your circle of responsibility?
10. What personal benefits did you experience by fulfilling your personal responsibilities?
11. What experiences have you had in doing everything in your power to heal a relationship and it is not healed? How did you respond? How has your life been different since then?
12. What losses or consequences have you experienced by doing the right thing? What did God teach you through that?

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