



17. WHO ARE YOU  
FIGHTING?

*Conflict teaches us about  
ourselves and others.*

#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

## WHO ARE YOU FIGHTING?

*Ephesians 6:12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

With COVID-19 on our doorsteps and we being confined to small spaces, we might be struggling with conflict in our homes. Outbursts. Anger. Rage. Things that we did not have to face before. Before lockdown we could escape going to school, to work, to friends, to family members or going for a drive or a walk when conflict arose. We could go to the shops or even to the gym to blow off some steam when things got a little bit heated, but now we are stuck at home. For some of us this may be a time of great agony as we are stuck with each other every single day. Children might be running up and down. Our parents might be in our home. Other family members might even be guests, visiting because they have nowhere to go. Conflict could be something you are struggling with now during this time of lockdown because of all the restrictions.

There is a song that says everybody needs a little time away from each other. I used to think this is such a silly song, but the truth of the matter is that all of us need space. All of us need a place where we can go, where we can think and where we can rationalise about the things we are facing around us. Are you experiencing waves of conflict that keep spilling over your proverbial beach and over your proverbial shore at the moment?

**EVERYONE NEED A PLACE WHERE  
THEY CAN GO, WHERE THEY CAN  
THINK AND WHERE THEY CAN  
RATIONALISE ABOUT THE THINGS  
THEY ARE FACING IN LIFE.**



There are people who have received some advice on how to deal with the conflict during the time of lockdown. We have Bible verses that say things like: *“Don’t let the sun go down on your anger.”* The problem with this advice is that we end up being very tired and very angry trying to talk things through, talking in circles and not really coming to any conclusion, just making matters much worse. Some people will say if you go through conflict, just speak about it, talk it through. Sometimes talking it through seems to make things worse because we do not really have a specific goal or a specific purpose with the things we say. Once again, we talk in circles.

Some people say to deal with conflict you need to learn to compromise, but what if compromising means you have to go against that which you stand for. Although these advices seem good, they can be detrimental. Sometimes others will say it is not worth it, just let it go. Don't say anything, just walk away, stay silent, don't get involved in conflict, but this can also become very frustrating because you can only keep silent and bottle up for so long. Then you get this feeling of wanting to say something and you might have an outburst.

When you face conflict, others might say you must not allow people to walk over you. You must stand up for your rights. Fight for what is important to you. This advice could be good or bad.

Our world is wrapped in conflict at the moment. Through the ages there had been great conflicts all over the world, great battles like World War 1 and 2, numerous civil wars fought throughout the world, turf wars fought by gangs, but the greatest conflict, the greatest battle, is the unseen one the Bible talks about in the verse we've started off with. It is the conflict of all the ages.

**DON'T LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON  
YOUR ANGER.**

We call it the Great Controversy, the great conflict, the unseen battle that has been waging on since this earth has been created. Often when we fight, we fight at face value. We fight the small battles on the surface instead of realising that behind all these battles with our family or friends or colleagues or whoever it may be, there is an unseen battle waging, a battle for our minds, our hearts. Are you losing this unseen battle because you are concentrating so much on the battle that is at the surface?

The Bible says our fight is not against flesh and blood, but yet, we are fighting against flesh and blood daily and we find ourselves wrapped up in conflict with people, with flesh and blood. Why exactly is this? Conflict usually ensues with families and friends and in the workplace. Fights and conflict happen in teams where people are living together or working together in close confined spaces. Conflict is usually about 'I am right and you are wrong'. The problem with this is, if we are fighting as a **team**, if there is something to be achieved as a team and we are fighting amongst each other, we are going to lose as a team. A team is only strong when the members are united. Conflict separates team members.

When we fight with one another here on earth, we forget that there is a bigger conflict waging. We fight the wrong enemy and because we lose our face to face battles with one another, we are not just losing out on good healthy relationships, we are losing our souls for eternity. We become rude to one another. We become selfish. We want to take revenge. We lose not just here on earth because we spoil our relationships, we lose the greater battle of eternity as well.

**CONFLICT IS USUALLY ABOUT 'I AM RIGHT AND YOU ARE WRONG'. IF THERE IS FIGHTING WITHIN A TEAM, THE COMMUNAL GOAL WON'T BE REACHED RESULTING IN EVERYONE LOSING.**



2 Chronicles 14:11 tells us that when we are faced with battles, we should go to God. Here is an example of a king who went to the Lord when he was faced with conflict. The verse says that Asa called to the Lord God and said: *“Lord there is no one beside You to help in this battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, o Lord our God, for we trust in You. In Your name we have come against the multitude. O Lord, You are our God; let no man prevail against You.”* It is very interesting that Asa took the battle he was about to fight to God, saying that there was not just one kingdom coming against him and that it was not something personal, it was something greater, it was them fighting against God.

Psalms 34:19 says: *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”* Psalms 32:7 says the same: *“You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance.”* Psalms 50:15 says: *“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; and I will rescue you and you will honour Me.”*

The Bible is telling us that the first step towards dealing with conflict is to recognise there is a greater battle happening, that the battle is not just of surface value. Therefore we should take our battles, our conflicts, our disagreements, to the Lord and say: “Lord, help me to do what is right. Help me to approach this battle, this conflict, in the right attitude and the right atmosphere.” But instead of doing this, instead of going to the Lord and seeing the battle for what it truly is, we fight with the messenger. We fight with the small little minion that has been sent to come and disturb us. Let me explain: Conflict at face value arises because of our identity.

**THE BIBLE IS TELLING US THAT  
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UsuaConflict arises because somebody is pushing against us and we are pushing back. What do I mean with conflict arises because of our identity? Usually we are threatened in **who we are** and that is why conflict arises. Somebody is pushing us to do or to be something that we are not, consciously or subconsciously. Our values, the things that really matter to us, can cause conflict because somebody might come and push against our moral values and they might act in ways that differ from our moral values. We come into conflict because we feel we have to do something to defend or protect ourselves or defend or protect what we stand for. When somebody has a different approach or a different idea, we end up in conflict because our boundaries and what we stand for are violated.


Because people have different boundaries from ours, sometimes even within our own homes, we sit with so many differences and that cause conflict. We experience differences in:

- personality,
- love languages,
- goals,
- culture,
- emotional regulation (e.g. I am a very emotional person and the other person is not so emotional),
- temperaments,
- religious backgrounds.

Because we are so different, we are fighting one another. We try to create this place in our homes, in the church, in the world and in our workplaces where there are no differences. We think that unity means we need to do away with the differences.

**CONFLICT ARISES BECAUSE YOU  
FEEL YOU HAVE TO DO  
SOMETHING TO DEFEND YOURSELF  
OR PROTECT WHAT YOU STAND  
FOR.**




A close-up photograph of a person's arm, showing a tattoo on the forearm and a watch on the wrist. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

What we need to remember is that differences are good. We need to learn to live with differences and not fight because of differences. We need to learn to co-exist with the differences and use these differences for our benefit. At home, or at church or at the workplace, we are a team and the team can use differences to win at the game of life.

We need to start changing our thinking when it comes to conflict. How do you view conflict? Is your view of conflict very negative? Every single one of us has a metaphor in our heads for conflict. Maybe your metaphor for conflict is a slow dance on broken shards of glass? Perhaps you view it as a plague, which means you are going to avoid conflict like a plague. Perhaps you have the saying, 'it feels as if I am trying to hold back an ocean with a broom' as a metaphor. Because conflict just keeps coming, it is spilling over your shores like a wave. If this is your metaphor for conflict, you are going to struggle because you will always view it as something negative that you must run away from. We cannot run away from conflict. Conflict is a reality within our lives.

If you could learn to manage conflict, it would perhaps not feel like an ocean; maybe it wouldn't feel like walking on broken glass or maybe it wouldn't feel like the plague. If you can safely navigate your way through conflict, maybe you wouldn't try and avoid it. It is important for you to learn that conflict is not always negative and that it can be an opportunity to learn. See it as an opportunity to learn about one another's differences. Conflict teaches us about **ourselves**, what we value and what is important to us, what our boundaries are and what our temperaments are. It also teaches us the same about **others**.

**CONFLICT TEACHES US ABOUT  
OURSELVES, WHAT WE VALUE AND  
WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO US, WHAT  
OUR BOUNDARIES ARE AND WHAT  
OUR TEMPERAMENTS ARE.**



Many people are involved in conflict because they think they are blameless. Remember, usually when conflict ensues, it is about the 'I am right and you are wrong' principle. We think that our ways are the best ways and the other person's ways are the wrong ways. We think that the other person did something wrong and need to fix themselves. We feel justified ... I am not the one that is at fault, someone else is at fault. But it is not about who is right and who is wrong, it is about a goal that needs to be achieved and we are trying to achieve it in different ways. Who we are and how we are getting to the end point of things, sometimes differ. Remember a team loses if one person loses. If a couple is in a race together with their middle feet tied together and one falls while the other one tries to keep running, they are both going to lose.

We need to change our thinking about conflict. We need to realise that all of us have goals we want to achieve. There are goals to achieve within the family, within relationships. Sometimes we have different ways of trying to get there because we are so different. If we can focus on the goal, maybe the conflict will be less.

Conflict is not all bad, but when it goes over into fights or verbal abuse or physical violence, it becomes problematic. Conflict shows us our differences, but if we go over into negative action, or when we do not sort out the conflict, it becomes problematic.

Something interesting about conflict is that it starts in the brain. It starts with someone saying or doing something that goes against who we are or what we allow in our lives. In other words there is a stimulus. Once something happens that we do not feel comfortable with, it evokes an emotion inside us.

**IF YOU CAN FOCUS ON THE GOALS  
WITHIN A RELATIONSHIP AS  
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This is usually an uncomfortable emotion. An emotion of, 'no, this can't be. I don't like this. I feel uncomfortable.' The emotion that has evoked, triggers thoughts. If the emotion is negative, the thoughts are negative. We start thinking thoughts like: "Don't you dare do this! I am going to get you back! You better change!" These negative thoughts evoke and trigger more negative emotions. We start feeling angry and frustrated. "How could this person do that? How could they say that? Why are they doing that?" This makes our thoughts even more negative and eventually our emotions and thoughts are so scrambled up that we end up making bad choices. We end up acting and behaving in very negative unchristlike manners.

There is nothing we can do about our first, initial emotion when we are triggered by conflict. However, something that we can change, are our thoughts. There is a verse that says: *"As a man thinks, so he is."* The Bible knows the importance of our thoughts and of right thinking. It says: *"Be ye therefore transformed by the renewing of your mind. Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus."* It further says: *"Now brothers, whatsoever things are pure, holy, honest, and of good report, think on these things ..."* When we get into conflict, our negative thinking usually ends up bringing us in more trouble. We are very suspicious, we exaggerate situations, we make assumptions, we jump to conclusions. We have this 'all or nothing' thinking.

We need to start thinking rationally when it comes to conflict. Be careful of words like, never and always. Thinking that the world will **never** be the same again, or I **always** end up with the end of the stick that is short or **everybody** is abandoning me. Be careful of your mind during this time.

**NEGATIVE THINKING IN CONFLICT  
SITUATIONS USUALLY SERVE TO  
BRINGING ABOUT EVEN MORE  
TROUBLE.**

Be careful of how you think. Your thinking can get you into a lot of trouble and it can make conflict worse.

We need to learn to think more positively. Think of the bright side of life. Have you ever heard the saying: *'You have to look at the glass as half full, not half empty'*? There is also a song we like to sing, saying: *'Count your blessings, count them one by one.'* When conflict comes, we forget the blessings. We forget the good things. We forget to focus on the goals. We forget to look at the bright side of things. We become very pessimistic in conflict instead of being optimistic.

Don't be impulsive. The reason why we act out impulsively and get ourselves into a lot of trouble and conflict and start becoming verbally abusive and violent, is because we do not control our thinking. If we cannot control our thinking, it will end up controlling our behaviour. We need to ask ourselves whether the actions we are contemplating, all the thoughts we are hobbling, the emotions we are feeling, will bring out the best in us. I have witnessed many people focusing solely on the terrible things during this distressing time instead of focusing on the positives that could be. Be careful of your brain during this time. We all have conflict styles, things that we do when we are faced with conflict. There are five conflict styles I want to highlight for you.

1. Some of us are **withdrawing turtles**, in other words, we run away when conflict comes. Sometimes this is good because at times it is necessary to withdraw from conflict in order to have enough time to think, in order to have time to be at peace and rationalise how we are going to respond to the conflict. Proverbs 21:19 says it is better to sit on a roof than to be in a house with a nagging wife. All of us need a little bit of time to think about the conflict and how we are going to respond to it.

**CONFLICT STYLE 1: THE  
WITHDRAWING TURTLE THAT HIDES  
FROM CONFLICT .**



2. Another way to respond to conflict is to be the **accommodating teddy bear**, in other words to say: "This fight is not worth it, this fight is something small. I am going to let it go. I am going to give you your way in this matter. It is not a big deal." In Colossians 3:13-14 we are advised to *"make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone that offended you. Remember the Lord forgave you so you must forgive others as well."* In other words people choose a specific path and sometimes we must not fight about it. We must just forgive them when they take that specific path and not make it a big issue.

3. Another type of conflict style is called the **dominating shark**. The dominating shark is somebody who pushes, who says: "This is not something I am going to run away from. This is not something I am going to accommodate you on. This is a matter that I feel very strongly about and I am going to stand to my guns. This is how it is going to be." This style might feel like a very bad conflict style, but it is not. Sometimes it is needed, especially when it comes to moral issues.

4. There is a fourth type of conflict style which is called the **compromising fox**. The compromising fox is saying: "You know what, let's see if we can talk this through." An 'I win and you win' situation. "Let's go 50-50 on this. Let's see if we can negotiate so that both of us can be happy."

5. The fifth conflict style is the **problem solving owl**. This is somebody who takes the time to communicate, to talk through things, to look at all the different aspects of what the conflict is about. This person will try to come to a conclusion. This is somebody who has very good listening skills. James 1:19 talks about this conflict style: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

**CONFLICT STYLE 2: THE  
ACCOMODATING TEDDY BEAR THAT  
GIVES IN TO THE OTHERS WISHES.**

All these conflict styles have good points and bad points. Sometimes we cannot take the time to talk through things. Sometimes decisions need to be made immediately. Sometimes there is no compromise to be struck. Sometimes it is a moral issue where it has to be this way and then we stick to our guns. Other times it is not so important and we accommodate and we love and we are kind and we talk good and well to each other. Then at other times, because it is a difficult or a life-threatening situation, we don't get into conflict with people, we rather withdraw and we take time to go and think it through.

The problem is that most of us have a default style we go into. Either we retreat and we give in all the time, or we compromise all the time, or we want to talk things through all the time, or we fight it out all the time. None of these are satisfying solutions in themselves. We need to learn that there is a time and a place for everything. Each of these styles will give the best results in specific situations. Jesus understood this, He never just went for one style.

There were times when Jesus was silent, when He did not say anything, when He said there is no use to argue with a fool. Sometimes Jesus literally ran away from the conflict, when He fled for His life [TURTLE]. Other times He only spoke and acted when it was an important matter [TEDDY BEAR].

You might tell me that Jesus never negotiated, but just think about Lot. God said to Lot: "Flee to the mountains." Then Lot asked: "Can't I go to a city close by?" God compromised and said it was okay, but He also warned Lot not to look back. So He compromised, but He gave other rules together with the compromise [FOX]. We know that unfortunately Lot paid the price for this compromise.

**CONFLICT STYLE 3: THE  
DOMINATING SHARK: IS THE  
PERSON THAT INSISTS ON HAVING  
IT THEIR WAY.**



Sometimes Jesus even acted like a SHARK. He had non-negotiable boundaries. He would not get into a debate about. He just simply said: "This is My Father's temple. You will not do the things that you are doing here." He threw over the tables and cleaned out the temple. It is clear that each situation called for different types of approaches.

Then there were times when Jesus sat down and explained things. Times when He talked things through with His disciples and with those who were listening to Him [OWL]. Every situation calls for a different style.

The true problem with conflict is that we learn from the world how to deal with it. We watch movies and series and we listen to people and we follow their examples on how to try and deal with conflict. It is our sinful hearts that get us into trouble. If we follow biblical injunctions when faced with conflict, we would come out of it very differently.

Proverbs 25:28 says: "Like a city whose walls are broken through, is a person who lacks self-control." Do we control ourselves during times of conflict? Do we choose the right conflict styles? Ephesians 4:2-3 says: "Be completely humble and be gentle, be patient, bearing with one another." Do we bear with one another's faults or do we just attack when they are different from ours? 1 Peter 4:8 reads: "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins." Do we truly have that deep-seated love for one another that, when they do things that are not so good, we can bear with them? Love never gives up. In conflict we often give up. "Love never loses faith, it always hopes, always endures in all circumstances" (1 Corinthians 13:6).

**CONFLICT STYLE 4: THE  
COMPROMISING FOX. A PERSON  
WHO SAYS LETS COMPROMISE SO  
WE BOTH GET SOMETHING.**

Romans 14:19 says: *“Let us follow after things which make for peace and things by which we may build each other up.”*

Are we building each other up, or are we trying to get our own way? Is it about ‘I win and you lose’, or are we building each other up? Are we making it about us, about the team?

There are a few questions we must ask ourselves when we are faced with conflict. Who am I fighting? Am I keeping my spiritual eye on the bigger picture? Have I taken my conflict to God for a solution? Have I laid it before His feet? Have I stopped and thought this through? Have I controlled my thoughts towards positive thinking instead of negative thinking so that I can control my actions? What differences are being brought up in this conflict? What am I learning about myself and about others?

What conflict style should I use in this specific situation? (Don't just go to your default, it might not be the best conflict style in this particular situation.) Am I practicing my Christian graces or am I using worldly methods in communicating my needs?

We cannot control how others respond to conflict, but we can control our own reactions and remain pure before God. Romans 12:17 says: *“If someone has done you wrong, do not repay him with wrong. Try to do what everyone considers to be good. Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.”* May you be able to manage conflict better during this time of stress.

**CONFLICT STYLE 5: THE WISE OWL. A PERSON WHO TALKS THROUGH THE ISSUE UNTILL A SOLUTION IS FOUND.**



# Podcast



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