

session 9 study guide

resolving conflict

starter

4 X 4 BUILDING: Divide into groups of four people each. Give each group four sheets of 8" x 11" paper and one length of tape. Each team will attempt to build the tallest freestanding tower possible in four minutes using only the supplies provided. After your tower is finished and the winner is determined, answer the following.

1. What ways did your team discuss how to build the tower?

2. Was there any disagreement? If so, how did you handle the disagreement?

3. How did you decide the best way to build the tower?

message

Have you ever had an argument with your parents? A squabble with your siblings? Of course you have. Family conflict has been a common theme throughout history, and it is a common theme throughout the Bible as well. Ever heard of Cain and Abel? The Prodigal Son? Or how about Jacob and Esau?

In Genesis 25:21-23, we read the story of how these two babies jostled each other in the womb before they were even born! Later, when the two brothers were adolescents, Jacob, the younger brother, sold Esau, his older brother, a bowl of soup in exchange for Esau's share of the inheritance—and also deceived their aging father into giving him a final blessing that was intended for Esau (see Genesis 25:29-34; 27:1-45). In short, Esau had every reason to be peeved with his brother Jacob. In fact, the Bible says, “Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob’” (Genesis 27:41).

Fearing for his life, Jacob fled from his brother. After taking refuge with his uncle for many years, God told Jacob to go back to the land of his fathers (see Genesis 31:3). So Jacob began to make the journey back home, knowing that he would ultimately have to face his older brother. Read the conclusion to their story in Genesis 32:1-20 and 33:1-12. As you read these verses, consider the following questions: (1) How is Jacob feeling about meeting his brother Esau? (2) How does Esau respond?

Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, “This is the camp of God!” So he named that place Mahanaim.

Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He instructed them: “This is what you are to say to my master Esau: ‘Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, menservants and maidservants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.’”

When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” In great fear and distress Jacob divided the

people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape."

Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds."

He instructed the one in the lead: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?' then you are to say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.'"

He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: "You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. And be sure to say, 'Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.'" For he thought, "I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me." . . .

Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked.

Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant." Then the maidservants and their children approached and bowed down. Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.

Esau asked, "What do you mean by all these droves I met?"

"To find favor in your eyes, my lord," he said.

But Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself."

"No, please!" said Jacob. "If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need." And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

Then Esau said, "Let us be on our way; I'll accompany you."

dig

1. What did Jacob do to prepare to see his brother Esau?

2. What do you think was going through Jacob's mind before he saw his brother?

3. There are several things that Jacob did to reach this point of reconciliation with his brother. The first is that he *identified the problem* and *confessed his fears* (see Genesis 32:11). What does the saying "a problem named is a problem half-solved" mean? Why is it important to identify the conflict or problem?

4. Next, Jacob *took the initiative in resolving the conflict* (see Genesis 32:3-5). Being the first one to initiate the process of reconciliation isn't easy. Yet what are the benefits of doing so?

5. Jacob then *prayed about the problem* (see Genesis 32:9-12). Notice that when he prayed, he first identified the conflict and then asked for God's help by calling upon His past promises. What promises of God does Jacob bring up?

6. Jacob also *considered his brother's perspective* and *tried to anticipate his possible resistance* (see Genesis 32:13-20). What is the value of looking at the problem from the other person's perspective and anticipating their response?

7. When Jacob finally met his brother, he *clearly communicated how he felt* (see Genesis 33:3,8-11). How did Jacob communicate his feelings to his brother?

8. Finally, Jacob *took action to correct the problem* by making restitution (see Genesis 33:10-11). How did Jacob try to make amends for his actions against his brother?

9. How did Esau respond to seeing his brother?

10. What do you think would have happened if Esau had responded differently?

apply

1. Which of the following issues can turn your house into a war zone? Rank the following conflict points with your parents from 1 to 10, with 10 being the easiest to handle and 1 being the hardest.

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| ___ a messy room | ___ choice of friends |
| ___ coming home too late | ___ spending money |
| ___ home responsibilities | ___ church attendance |
| ___ bad language | ___ school performance |
| ___ phone use | ___ clothing choices |

2. Why is your top choice such a conflict for you and your parents? Describe the situation from your perspective.

3. Now describe the issue from your parents' perspective. How do they see the issue?

4. Look back at the story of Jacob and Esau. What is something that Jacob did to resolve his conflict with Esau that you need to better incorporate into your life?

5. Read the following scenarios and answer the questions that follow.

Scenario One: *Kristen is a good kid most of the time. She and her mom are the best of friends and the worst of enemies, often in the same day. Kristen isn't always the best at obeying, and her mom often nags her. One of their biggest problems is Kristen's use of the phone. "That phone looks like it's connected to your head," she often hears her mother cry. "Kristen, have you done your homework?" "Kristen, you can't talk with anyone until you've washed the dishes." "Kristen, you have been on the phone for an hour!" Whenever Kristen hears her mom complaining about the phone, she talks back to her mother, and then they blow up at each other.*

What advice would you give Kristen?

What advice would you give her mom?

Scenario Two: *Trevor's mom and stepdad have a hard and fast rule: You must tell the family where you will be at all times. Trevor agreed that was an acceptable rule, but he has broken it on a regular basis and disobeyed his parents. One time, he walked to the nearby park with a friend without telling his parents. Another time, he was across the street at the neighbor's, but his parents didn't know and they became frantic. Once he told his mom he was going to the library and instead went to an R-rated movie that he had already been told he could not see.*

What advice would you give Trevor?

What advice would you give his parents?

6. Imagine that the junior high youth group asks you to come talk about conflict resolution. Think about the conflicts you've successfully resolved in the past. What advice would you give the junior highers about how to resolve issues with their parents and siblings?

reflect

1. What is the typical way your family handles conflict?

2. Does each family member handle conflict in a different manner? If so, how?

3. Who do you know who deals with conflict well? What does he or she do?

4. What can you learn from this person?

5. Who do you need to resolve a conflict with? What can *you* do to help move the conflict toward resolution?

6. Should conflicts be dealt with right away? Are there times when it is better to wait to resolve a conflict?

7. God had a conflict with us—we sinned, which severed our connection with God. How was this conflict resolved (see John 3:16-17)?

8. How can you view conflicts as opportunities?

meditation



Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

COLOSSIANS 3:13

