

SESSION 3

# Confidence in the Midst of Conflict



**QUESTION 1:**

***What's the smallest thing you've  
seen someone fight about?***

## THE POINT

Trust God when conflict disrupts your relationships.

## THE PASSAGES

Genesis 13:5-11,14-18

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I learned how to sail when I was a kid. When I think of sailing, I think of one word: tension. From the moment you board the sailboat to the time you go ashore, you are constantly managing tension.

**I** The tension balancing the boat as you constantly shift the weight of your body

**I** The tension of the rippling current that presses against the rudder

▶ The tension of the main sail rope tugging in your hand  
Just like sailing, we are always managing tensions in life.

For example:

**The tension of finances**

**I** The tension of how we respond to news and politics

**I** The tension of maintaining healthy habits

▶ The tension of the growing pile of dirty laundry

But one of the most difficult tensions we must manage is relational tension. We can't escape it. 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.

**Genesis 13:5-8**

**5 And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.**

**6 And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.**

**7 And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.**

**8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.**

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 "sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels" (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 herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle." It was a "turf war" type of conflict.

"Hey! Your donkeys are drinking all the water!"

"Oh yeah? Well, your sheep are eating all the grass!"

You can sense the tension heating up. As leader of the large assembly, Abram had a choice: he could ignore the conflict, or he could confront it. Abram chose to confront it. "And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren." 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: "We be brethren."

We face the same decision anytime conflict arises in our relationships. Do we ignore the issue or confront it? Do we 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 endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in 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? Have I done everything I can do to resolve the conflict?

I have the honor of pastoring Mile City Church in Detroit, Michigan. I am also privileged to lead an amazing staff team. From the very beginning, I knew the enemy would be fired up to destroy the unity of our team. What better way to destroy our work than to stir up tension among the leaders. The staff has always been like family, but I have stayed on the offense against the enemy's schemes. I have implemented the following phrase in my monthly review with each staff member: *An imaginary conversation deserves a real conversation.* For example, have you ever been having an imaginary conversation with someone in your head while driving alone in your car, going for a walk, or trying to fall asleep? That imaginary conversation could be a signal that it is time to have a real conversation with that person.

That's what Abram did with Lot. They talked, and 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. Over and over, this practice has prevented a lot of unnecessary conflict within our team at church.

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. Don't fall prey to

thinking that you are overreacting or that you'll be making a big deal out of nothing. Make it a big deal before it becomes a big deal. Abram modeled that for us in his relationship with Lot.

**QUESTION 2:**

***What are some things that make conflict worse in our culture?***

---

**Genesis 13:9-11**

**9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.**

**10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.**

**11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.**

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. To make things right, we must be willing to put the other person first. Abram said, "If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." *You go first, Lot. Whatever plot of land you want, go ahead and take it. I'll take what's left.*

Abram demonstrated the importance of putting the needs of others before our own needs, a principle Paul spelled out centuries later. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in



lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). Any principle from God's Word is the right one, 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 can be done, but we must humble ourselves first.

Humility is the key when it comes to solving relational tension. God will have nothing to do with a self-centered, prideful stance. As Peter wrote, "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). Pride knocks you down; humility lifts you up.

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.

As humble as Abram was, his descendant 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. 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.

**QUESTION 3:**

*What do you appreciate about the way Abram and Lot resolved their differences?*

**Genesis 13:14-18**

14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

18 Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

Tragically for Lot, he made a poor decision. He may have thought he was getting the better land—land that "was well watered every where, ... even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt" (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 "pitched his tent toward Sodom" (v. 12), but later we find that he "dwelt in Sodom" (14:12), and finally we see that he "sat in the gate of Sodom" (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, stayed where he was and 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. Even though the land was still in the hands of the Canaanites and Sarai still had not yet conceived, nothing had changed from God's perspective.

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 far out of reach and a solution seems unimaginable—even when we hear Jesus' words, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

God keeps His word to us, but His timing is not always in line with our schedules. When we feel let down, or when things don't go as planned, the last thing we should do is shut down, close our eyes, and exclude God. Instead, we should do what God told Abram to do: "Look." Look around. Look up. God is still there, and He has not abandoned us or His promises.

The situation between Abram and Lot was solved quickly, but what do we do when our 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, especially when it comes to relational tension. 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 for reconciliation to occur, 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. We keep trusting that God will break through the walls. We keep trusting the Holy Spirit to convict as we do our part to forgive and help manage the tension.

Abram responded by moving his tent to Hebron, where he built another altar—another place of worship. Scripture does not



reveal what Abram said or prayed as he worshiped, but I wonder if He calmed his mind before God by praying about the strife that occurred and praising Him for the solution that occurred. Likewise, we are to maintain an attitude of worship whether or not difficulties have been resolved. A continual attitude of worship and prayer keeps us leaning on Christ—and gives us confidence in the midst of conflict.

**QUESTION 4:**

*When has God proven to you that He will take care of you?*

**QUESTION 5:**

*How can trust in God help us during times of conflict?*

**ENGAGE**

*The world has a vastly different view of handling conflict than God's Word. How would you respond to a friend who made the following statements? (Choose one.)*

"The most important part of resolving a conflict is sharing your truth."

"I refuse to listen to anyone who holds that point of view."

"I think it's best if we just don't talk about it."

---

## LIVE IT OUT

We are to trust God when conflict disrupts our relationships. Choose one of the following applications:

**I Pray.** As an act of worship, lift up those that you might have relational tension with right now. Also as you pray, a tension from your past might come to the forefront of your mind; pray for those people as well.

**I Check your pride.** In comparison to Jesus, what is the level of your humility? Go to God and ask him to reveal where your pride might be getting the best of you. Remember pride knocks you down; humility lifts you up.

**I Reconcile.** What imaginary conversation have you been having with a person that you know you need to have a real conversation with? Pick up the phone, set up the meeting, and have the difficult conversation.

