

**Bible reading Matthew 18:15-20**

**Doing conflict well**

Jesus says that those who live in a kingdom community should watch over one another in love, gently pointing out when a brother or sister fails to live by the values Jesus teaches.



**Bible notes**



Perhaps it's unsurprising that the New Testament suggests there was a good deal of conflict in the Early Church.

This little community was under a lot of pressure from outsiders, and their stress levels would have been high – ideal circumstances for frustration and tension.

This reading explores how to handle conflict well.

It follows on from Jesus' teaching that a little child is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (18:1-4), and the parable of the lost sheep (18:10-14). These texts create a context for this discussion of conflict. If there is a risk of losing anyone, the disciples should make every effort to bring them back into fellowship. The process set out here has parallels in texts from other contemporary communities, especially the Dead Sea scrolls, though Matthew's version is more flexible. The first stage, a one-to-one conversation, enables 'listening'. Beyond 'hearing', the process of 'listening' implies real engagement with the points made, leading to change and restoration. However, the text reflects a hierarchical assumption that the church leader is right and the member is wrong. In general, conflicts are more complex. The second stage involves one or two others, recalling Deuteronomy 19:15 demanding multiple witnesses. The requirement for community engagement is extended by the involvement of the Church. Finally, the unrepentant sinner is to be excluded – but treated as an object of mission, like Gentiles and tax-collectors. Jesus never condemns such people but sits and eats with them (11:18-20). This identification is not total abandonment but a pathway to change. The passage ends with a wider reflection on a question that was very relevant at the time when Matthew wrote. Following the destruction of the Temple, where were people to find God's forgiveness? For Matthew, the answer is through communication with Jesus.



Braid long pieces of ribbon or yarn into friendship bracelets. God made us for relationship and we interact with others every day. In our communication, are we kind and encouraging? Have we got tangled up into knots and conflict? What can you do to communicate well? Give your bracelet to a friend and thank them for being your friend.

**First impressions**

- What does good communication look or feel like?
- How do you do conflict well?
- What happens when you cannot all agree?



**LISTEN**

Listen to the news on the radio. When a story moves you, turn the programme off and consider where Jesus is in this situation. What would Jesus want to see as an outcome? Pray for peace and reconciliation in this story and other situations of conflict you know about.

**Pray** 

God of peace, we pray for peace throughout the world. Send us out as peacemakers, people who help to set things right where there is disagreement, who try to resolve conflict. Show us the way of peace in our own lives, and in our homes and places of learning, in our streets and throughout our community. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Write*

In just a few words, write (or draw something to represent) a current conflict situation or disagreement you are concerned about. Light a candle and place your paper near to it, as a sign of bringing that situation to Jesus, the light of the world. Pray: Lord, help me in the conflicts and disagreements in my life. I bring my dilemmas to you and ask for your guidance. Help me to communicate well to bring all conflict to a positive resolution. Amen.



Enjoy a board game like Taboo or Articulate with friends. Be aware of your communication skills. Are you quick to speak or quiet? Are you a good listener?