
Stay Focused (Watch Out For The “Squirrels” of Distraction)

The 10 Commandments of Conflict Resolution

Pastor Wil Nichols

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Victorious Praise Fellowship Church of God in Christ

2116 Page Rd. Durham NC 27703

WEBSITE: www.VictoriousPraise.org

EMAIL: PastorWil@VictoriousPraise.org, Info@VictoriousPraise.org

PHONE: (919) 957-7500

Sermon: The 10 Commandments of Conflict Resolution: Stay Focused (Watch Out For The “Squirrels” of Distraction)

Lesson Text

Philippians 3:13–16 (KJV)¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Ephesians 4:26–27 (KJV)²⁶ Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: ²⁷Neither give place to the devil.

Introduction

In the first two messages of this series, “The 10 Commandments of Conflict Resolution,” we learned to stop running from the fire of conflict and allow it to forge us into one, and we also learned that there must be a better way or approach to our issues.

In our last message, we looked at A Better Approach to our Tongue, our Emotions, and our Peace: which was to change our Ears, our Heart, and our Mind.

Let’s now start looking at the actual commandments that highly effective people follow to deal with and resolve conflict.

Romans 12: ¹⁶ *Be* of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. ¹⁷ Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

The bible is not just a good book to read or preach to other people, but it is the divine instructions of God on how to live our lives. It’s how we become able to keep the main Commands of Love God and Love Your Neighbor (Grow Deeper and Grow Closer).

In my workbook for “The Relationship Battle Plan”, I list 10 Commandments of Conflict Resolution, that when followed, we will resolved our conflict, and live happier lives:

Today we will look at the first two Commandments:

- Commandment 1: Thou Shalt Focus on “One” issue not “Many” issues
- Commandment 2: Thou Shalt Watch Your Anger Level

Our second lesson text gives us the instructions concerning our anger, but our first lesson text applies to both commandments as it talks about the importance of staying focused.

It opens talking about not becoming distracted by past accomplishments, past failures, or even what’s behind us, but to keep pressing towards the “Heavenly Prize.”

Why does Paul command us to keep pressing? Because we will be tempted with distractions.

Years ago, I was watching this animated movie called “Up,” and it had this character that kept getting distracted by squirrels. He would have a task, or be going someplace, and “Squirrel!”

Life is filled with Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Squirrels, and if we are not careful, we will lose our divine purpose, lose our way, and not obtain our heavenly prize because of these Squirrels.

Philippians 3:15 (The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language)¹⁵⁻¹⁶ So let’s keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you’ll see it yet!

Series and Sermon: The 10 Commandments of Conflict Resolution: Stay Focused (Watch Out For The “Squirrels” of Distraction)

“Stay Focused on the Main Thing, The Main Emotion, and The Main Prize”

I. Stay Focused on the Main Thing

Philippians 3: ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

The first commandment of conflict resolution is “Thou Shalt Focus on One issue not Many issues”.

2 Corinthians 2: ¹¹ Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

One of the devices of the enemy when he can’t stop us outright is to distract us.

Don’t be distracted by the Spiritual, Physical, or Emotional Squirrels!

When God gives us an assignment, we start well, but somewhere along the way we get distracted.

Squirrels can look like shiny objects of opportunity; busy work of things that don’t matter; or other assignments, but not the assignment that God gave us.

When it comes to the conflicts and offenses, we have the same “Squirrel” problems.

We start out with one issue (conflict, affliction, or fire) which is designed to forge us into a common vision, a stronger emotional connection, or deeper commitment! But we become distracted with other issues and conflicts.

The argument starts out about the kitchen, defensiveness kicks in and starts with the trash; the first person gets offended and brings up the finances; then it's the kids, and so on... Four hours later, heated tempers, and 10 different arguments, no one is even listening by now!

Galatians 5: ⁷ Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

Hebrews 12: ¹ Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

Hebrews 12: ² Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Ignore the squirrels and stay focused on the main thing.

II. Stay Focused on the Main Emotion

Ephesians 4: ²⁶ Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: ²⁷ Neither give place to the devil.

The second commandment of conflict resolution is “Thou Shalt Watch Your Anger Level.”

Don't be distracted by the Emotional Alcohol.

I call anger emotional alcohol because in a lot of ways it works the same as alcohol. It does to us emotionally, what alcohol does to us physically, it impairs us!

Alcohol impairs our vision, it imparts our decision making, it impairs our speech, and it impairs our judgment.

So, if anger is so bad why would God say, “Be Angry?” Because there is a righteous anger and a sinful anger, and you have to stay focused on your anger, or you will fall into the wrong one.

Righteous Anger is when the character of God is impugned. Jesus showed righteous anger when God's house was being abused:

- Matthew 21: ¹² And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, ¹³ And said unto them, It is written, **My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.**

- Aristotle said, “Anybody can become angry—that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is *not* easy.”

We must stay focused on our anger, or else it will shift into unrighteous anger and sinful wrath.

- Ephesians 4:26 (The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language)²⁶⁻²⁷ Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don’t use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don’t stay angry. Don’t go to bed angry.

Emotional Alcohol or Wrath gives the devil a foothold or a **base of operations** in our lives.

- Nursing of grudges, harboring resentments, carrying over irritations, malice, wrath, envy, hatred, or uncontrolled passions are all keys to emotional alcohol. Which in turn will lead to wrath and spiritual impairment.

Unfocused Anger will Spiritually Impair our Vision: We lose our open vision with God. 1 Samuel 3: ¹ And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; *there was* no open vision.

Unfocused Anger will Spiritually Impair our Decision Making: We lose our way and direction, and we make bad choices. Proverbs 14: ¹² There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.

Unfocused Anger will Spiritually Impair our Speech: We lose our spiritual voice to speak life. Proverbs 18: ²¹ Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

Unfocused Anger will Spiritually Impair our Judgment: We lose our spiritual discernment. Matthew 13: ¹⁵ **For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and *their* eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.**

We must stay focused so we can write the vision; stay focused so that God can order our steps; stay focused so that we can speak life; and stay focused to discern the things of God.

III. Stay Focused on the Main Prize

Philippians 3: ¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

- We must Stay Focused on the Main Thing and not be distracted by Spiritual Squirrels
- We must Stay Focused on the Main Emotion and not give the devil a foothold in our lives
- We must Stay Focused on the Main Prize and settle for the Consolation Prize.

Philippians 3: ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the **heavenly prize** for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

The fact that Paul says that he has to press for the “Prize of the High Calling” or “Heavenly Prize” tells us that there are other prizes. These are what we call “Consolation Prizes”.

A Consolation prize is a prize given to a competitor who fails to win or who finishes last. I call these participation prizes, thanks for trying prizes, better luck next time prizes.

If the enemy can't get us to give up on the race, then he will distract us with participation prizes, on settling or “that is good enough” prizes.

“I’m a good Christian;” “I go to church on Sunday;” “I’m not as bad as them;” “God understands;” “Nobody’s perfect;” “God knows my heart” are for Consolation Prizes.

Don’t be distracted by the Consolation Prizes:

- Don’t become distracted by Yourself: Philippians 3: ¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: - Philippians 4: ¹³ I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.
- Don’t become distracted by what’s in Your Rearview Mirror: Philippians 3: ¹³...but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, - Philippians 3: ¹³ ..., and reaching forth unto those things which are before,
- Don’t become distracted by what’s in Your Past Philippians 3: ¹³...but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind...: - Jeremiah 29: ¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Stay Focused on the Main Prize: Philippians 3: ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Stay Focused and keep standing, keep believing, keep praying, keep praising, keep dancing, keep running, keep fighting, keep pressing!

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Midweek Study Lesson Plan (Sermon: Stay Focused (Watch Out For The “Squirrels” of Distraction))

Lesson Text

- Philippians 3:13–16, Ephesians 4:26–27

Sermon Outline (Notes)

- I. *Stay Focused on the Main Thing*
- II. *Stay Focused on the Main Emotion*
- III. *Stay Focused on the Main Prize*

Questions (What was your main takeaway from Sunday’s Sermon?)

I. Getting to Know “Me”

1. On a scale where one is a minimalist and five is a hoarder, where would you rank yourself? a) One, minimalist; b) Two; c) Three; d) Four; e) Five, hoarder.
2. When you are having a challenging day, what do you do to make yourself feel better?

II. Into the Bible

1. Read Galatians 5:1-12, which speaks of the circumcised and the uncircumcised. Describe the conflict going on in these verses.
2. Read Galatians 5:13-26. What conflict is mentioned in these verses... is it internal or external? What does Paul tell the church to do to get through the conflict?

III. Life Application

1. When God gives you an assignment, what do you think is the most likely source of distraction for you?
a) an interesting opportunity b) video games or television c) other people’s problems d) illness e) work
2. Your friend tells you about something that has happened. They are very angry about it. What will you do and say to help them refocus and control their emotions?