

the best *you can be*

Lesson

8

TO DO LIST

## AN ASSERTIVE *woman*

"Blessed are you when people insult you,  
persecute you falsely and say all kinds of evil  
against you falsely because of me."

Matthew 5:11

ALL THROUGH LIFE WE FACE difficulties and disappointments. That is part of the sin factor and we can't avoid it. But we can decide how to respond. We can choose to be better or bitter in response to our circumstances; it is our choice. When we know Jesus and serve Him, our attitudes will define who we really are, and we can stand strong in the face of trouble. This lesson will explain just how we can do this.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us how to live. These chapters in Matthew provide the guiding principles for your life today and always. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11, 12).

Think carefully about what this text is saying, and resolve to rise above the difficulties



that might be thrown at you. Be strong and assertive in the face of difficulty and opposition. Jesus is with you.

Mary Slessor, a 19th Century missionary in Africa and the first woman magistrate in the British Empire, was an assertive woman. She was courageous and did not run away when there was trouble. Even at 16 years of age, she stood up to a gang of boys threatening to stop her Sunday school class. Later she stood up to angry African chiefs who planned to poison many villagers. She managed difficult people and conflict very well.

Three ways to handle conflict are FIGHT, FLIGHT, or FOCUS. The best way is focus. It brings conflict into the open, it expresses feelings, it allows the other person freedom to help resolve the conflict. Focus messages make room for a solution.

## BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

Queen Esther illustrates these three ways to handle conflict:

- **FIGHT** - Haman decided to fight Mordecai. He chose force to deal with Mordecai.
- **FLIGHT** - Haman's relationship with the king is an example of flight. When the king sent him to lead Mordecai through the streets, he meekly submitted to the king's wish, all the time hating it.
- **FOCUS** - Esther used the focus message in her relationships. She confronted the king, she asserted herself, and used the right technique to solve the problem and eliminate conflict.

## MODERN EXAMPLES

During church, the people behind you keep talking quite loudly, distracting you from the sermon. How might you resolve the conflict?

- **FIGHT** - Turn around and snarl at them, "Don't you have any respect for others? If you want to talk, you should leave."
- **FLIGHT** - Get up and leave yourself. Go to another spot in the church. Or just ignore the problem and hope it will go away. It won't.
- **FOCUS** - Smile sweetly and say, "Your talking disturbs me because I am unable to hear the preacher."

## THREE PARTS OF A FOCUS MESSAGE

It is plain to see that a focus message is smarter than either fight or flight reactions. How do we give a focus message? What ingredients should a focus message have?

- **Describe the behavior.** Give a nonjudgmental description of the behavior that is upsetting you. Do not blame or call names. Simply state the problem clearly in an objective way.
- **State your feelings.** Describe how the behavior makes you feel. Tell your feelings. Be as accurate as possible. Don't say you are a little upset if very angry is how you really feel.



- **Show the effect.** Give a clear statement of the concrete and tangible effect the behavior has on you. Do not give the solution to the problem. Give the other person individual freedom to do whatever he or she wishes about the problem.

What do you do if someone does not accept your focus message, but argues and fights back instead?

It is very important to stay in control of the situation. Wait until the person is finished. Try reflective listening skills. Let the person know that you heard them, then repeat your focus message calmly and clearly. Keep focusing on the problem. Don't get sidetracked, and don't attack the person.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

In Matthew 5:39-42, Jesus is teaching the concept of taking control of a conflict situation instead of allowing it to control you. He tells us to turn the other cheek, go two miles instead of one, and give more than is asked of us. But isn't this asking too much, asking us to be a doormat, allowing people to walk all over us?

Jesus was saying, "Don't fight when you come into conflict. Don't submit; don't run away. Stand and face the person and confront them. Take charge of the situation. Say, 'Ok, if you want me to go one mile, I'll make the decision here. I'll go two miles. Do you want my coat? Ok, I can do better than that. I'll give you my cloak as well.'"

The Christian way of dealing with interpersonal conflict is not fight. It is not flight. It is confrontation for focus.

## RATE YOURSELF

Rate yourself on the following assertive skills. One means you have low satisfaction with your skill in that area. Five means you are completely satisfied with your performance of that skill.

- 1. Use feeling talk.** You are comfortable in giving your personal feelings about a subject.

1            2            3            4            5

- 2. Talk about yourself.** You are able to share your accomplishments with others.

1            2            3            4            5

- 3. Make greeting talk.** You can initiate a conversation without apology or embarrassment.

1            2            3            4            5

- 4. Accept compliments.** You can accept compliments graciously instead of disagreeing with them, or playing them down.

1            2            3            4            5

- 5. Disagree when necessary.** You do not pretend to agree just to keep peace. You disagree graciously, but clearly.

1            2            3            4            5



- 6. Ask for clarification.** Rather than being confused about what someone has said, or about directions they have given, you ask him or her to restate or explain.

1            2            3            4            5

- 7. Speak up for your rights.** You do not let others take advantage of you when you feel put upon. You can say no without feeling guilty. You can ask to be treated with fairness, for example, when someone cuts in line ahead of you. You can register complaints calmly.

1            2            3            4            5

- 8. Avoid justifying yourself.** You are comfortable with your values and don't have to justify your actions and feelings.

1            2            3            4            5

## PERSONAL GROWTH EXERCISES

1. Practice making focus messages in the following situations:
  - Your assistant, who promised to do something for you at church, doesn't show up and you are left with the responsibility.
  - Your husband leaves his dirty clothes all over the floor.
  - Your neighbor plays loud music every night.
2. Think of three current conflicts you are experiencing. Write out some possible focus messages you could use in dealing with them.
3. Make a list of feeling words. Try for 100. Rate them as strong or weak feeling. In focus messages it is important to state correctly the degree of feeling.

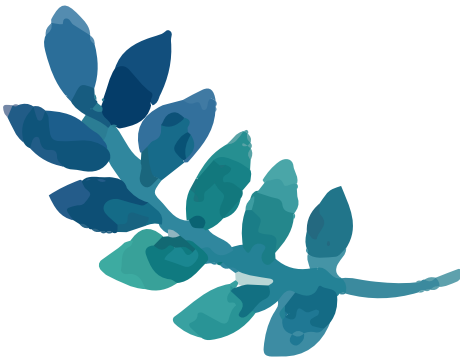
Remember that Jesus is always with you, and His promises are sure. "Do not fear, for I am with you; be not dismayed; for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). "I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5).

## SUCCESS PRINCIPLE

The secret of conflict resolution is not flight or flight, but focus.

## MY PRAYER FOR TODAY

Thank you, God, for Your presence in my life. Thank You for troubles that come my way because they help me focus on You and gain the strength I need for every trial. Help me never to forget Your promises that You will never forsake me and will always be there. I will go forth in Your strength and stand firm. Please be with me. I praise You and thank You.





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