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My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

—Hosea 4:6

Who is blind but My servant?

—Isaiah 42:19

Introduction



WE WERE CREATED TO LIVE IN THE LOVE AND excitement of harmonious relationships, free from dissension, confusion, and hurt. God wants our lives to be free from division; He wants us to live in peace with each other, yet such a life often eludes most of us. Instead, conflict wreaks havoc in our lives, leaving us wounded and alienated from one another. It is:

- Ending our marriages
- Embittering our children
- Alienating our friends and co-workers
- Splitting our churches
- Bankrupting our health
- Stealing our peace of mind and heart

I know because my life and ministry were once in danger of being destroyed by conflict and strife. My prayer is that as

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you read the following pages, your eyes will be opened and that you will see, more clearly than ever before, the destructive effects that conflict and dissension can have on your life—and that you will never again fail to recognize strife or confront it.

*If we want to experience
God's blessing and power,
we must resist the devil's
attempts to stir up strife.*



Jesus gave us His peace for our protection. We are to “hold our peace” and “let peace be the umpire” in every situation (Exod. 14:14; Col. 3:15). We should “crave peace and pursue it” and be “makers and maintainers of peace” (Ps. 34:14; Matt. 5:9).

God’s Word contains some wonderful promises for the peaceful, including Psalm 37:37: “Mark the blameless man and

behold the upright, for there is a happy end for the man of peace.” Think of it. If you are a person of peace—if you learn to resist conflict and strife—you will experience happiness. God says that His children will inherit righteousness, peace, and joy. The kingdom of God consists of these three things, but few who claim Christ as their Savior actually experience these benefits in their everyday lives. Satan deceives, lies, and beguiles believers through a lack of knowledge or the unwillingness to apply the knowledge we have.

God has instructed us to put on the full armor of God so that we can defeat the devil in every one of his strategies and deceits. (See Ephesians 6:10–18.) If we want to experience God’s blessing and power, we must resist the devil’s attempts to stir up strife. We must be on guard, because “the devil roams around like a

lion roaring [in fierce hunger], seeking someone to seize upon and devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

If relationship problems have plagued your life, then this book is for you. If you are wondering why you don’t experience spiritual power in your life and ministry, even though you are serving God and doing all you know to do, then this book is for you. If you are confused about why you are missing out on the blessings that God promises to His children, then this book is for you.

In it we are going to explore why so many of our relationships are the opposite of what Jesus promised, and what we can do to enjoy the life God wants us to have. In part 1 you will learn how to recognize strife so that you can, in turn, resist it. In part 2 you will discover how to heal your troubled relationships. And in part 3, you will learn how you can unleash God’s power and blessing in your life.

At the end of each chapter you will find a section devoted to summary and reflection. This section is designed to help you apply the insights you learn in each chapter. It will give you dynamic keys for discerning the roots and symptoms of conflict and strife so that you can enjoy trouble-free relationships.

Read on, and learn how your life and relationships can be full of harmony and power and blessing.

one

Why Is My Life So Difficult?



ONE EVENING MY HUSBAND, DAVE, AND I WERE going to pick up another couple to take them out to dinner. We had only been to their home one time, and it had been quite a while since that first visit. On our way there, Dave turned to me and said, “I don’t think I remember how to get to the house.”

“Oh, well, I do!” I promptly told him, and then proceeded to give him directions.

“I really don’t think that is the right way to go,” he said.

“Dave, you never listen to me!” I said. My tone and body language let him know that I did not appreciate his challenging me. At my persistence, Dave finally agreed to follow my directions. I told him that our friends lived in a brown

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house on a cul-de-sac at the end of such-and-such street. As we drove, I gave him directions for all the turns.

As our car turned onto the street where I believed the house to be, I noticed a bicycle lying on the sidewalk. “I know this is the right street,” I said, “because I remember that bicycle lying there the last time we were here!” We drove to the end of the street and—guess what! No brown house. No cul-de-sac. I was as wrong as wrong could be.

I wish I could say that this was an isolated incident. I can't. I created havoc in my life and in my relationships for many years and was a very difficult person to get along with. I was always in conflict with something or someone. I loved God, was born again, was baptized in the Holy Spirit, and had a call on my life to full-time ministry, but I was also very wounded and very angry.

I grew up in a violent and angry home, and my entire childhood was filled with fear, embarrassment, and shame. My father sexually, physically, verbally, and emotionally abused me from the time I was three until I left home at eighteen. He never physically forced me to submit to him, but he did force me to pretend I liked what he was doing. He used anger and intimidation to control other family members and me.

When I turned eighteen, I moved out of my parents' home while my father was away at work one day. Shortly after that, I married the first young man who showed any interest in me. My first husband was a manipulator, a thief, and a con man who was usually unemployed. He once abandoned me in California with nothing but a dime and a carton of soda bottles.

The abuse, violence, lies, and manipulation I endured left me feeling out of control, but of course I could not admit that. Nor could I admit the intense rage I felt. I was bitter toward life and

people. I resented those who had nice lives and had not endured the pain I had. I did not know how to receive God's love, grace, and mercy—or anyone else's.

Even after I married Dave, I continued to do everything I could to control the people and circumstances of my life so that I would never be hurt so deeply again. Of course, that didn't work very well. All of my relationships were strained and stressful, and I couldn't understand why.

Nor could I understand why my ministry wasn't growing and being blessed, despite all Dave's and my efforts and prayers. But as I began to grow in my relationship with the Lord, He began to work in my life. As I studied the Word and all the promises it gives us about peace, I came to want that for my life, and the Holy Spirit began to show me that strife was the cause of my problems. I learned to recognize it and to resist it. I now treat strife as a dangerous foe that will bring destruction if left unconforted.

Like me, many people are experiencing the devastation of strife, but they don't recognize it as the root cause of their problems. They blame others or Satan and don't realize that they have the power to say yes or no to conflict and strife. Instead of keeping strife out, they are holding open the door to conflict, all the time wondering why their lives are so difficult.

Like me, many people are experiencing the devastation of strife, but they don't recognize it as the root cause of their problems.



Learning to Recognize Strife

The dictionary defines *strife* as “fighting; heated, often violent conflict; bitter dissension; a struggle between rivals; or contention.”* Other descriptive words that describe strife are *quarrel*, *rivalry*, *wrangling*, *debate*, *provocation*, and *factions*. I define *strife* as a bickering, arguing, heated disagreement, or an angry undercurrent.

The Bible has much to say about strife and contention (which are actually the same thing) and points to strife as the source of many other kinds of problems. The apostle James wrote, “For wherever there is jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry and selfish ambition), there will also be confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) and all sorts of evil and vile practices” (James 3:16). And we read in Hebrews 12:14–15, “Strive to live in peace with everybody and pursue that consecration and holiness without which no one will [ever] see the Lord. Exercise foresight and be on the watch to look [after one another], to see that no one falls back from and fails to secure God’s grace (His unmerited favor and spiritual blessing), *in order that no root of resentment (rancor, bitterness, or hatred) shoots forth and causes trouble and bitter torment, and the many become contaminated and defiled by it*” (emphasis added).

Strife leads to resentment, rancor, bitterness, or hatred. Left unconflicted, it destroys and devastates. It causes trouble and brings torment to church members and to church leadership, hindering God’s work and contaminating many.

* *New Riverside University Dictionary* (Boston, MA: The Riverside Publishing Company, 1994), s.v. “strife.”

If a deadly plague should strike a household, the Department of Health would place the household in quarantine. Public notices would announce that the house is contaminated. No one would be allowed in or near the house for fear they would be contaminated and defiled also. We need to be as vigilant when it comes to eliminating strife.

That's why it's so important to learn how to identify the symptoms of strife, including:

- Pride (or defensiveness)
- Bitterness
- Hatred
- Judgment and criticism
- Deception and lies
- Anger
- Rebellion
- Unrest
- Fear and negativity

Anytime we give in to any of these feelings, we open the door to strife and usher in destruction. Strife kills! It kills the anointing, the blessings, the prosperity, the peace, and the joy.

Strife is not just a problem between people; it's often a problem within a person. What is going on inside of you? Is the atmosphere inside peaceful or tense? Strife can, and often does, affect our attitude first. One day I overheard a woman railing on and on about the postal system and the post office. After listening to her about late mail deliveries, lost packages, and the cost of postage, I thought, "This woman's anger has robbed her of peace and joy." As long as she was so angry at the post office,

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she certainly could never enjoy going to the post office. Even talking about it upset her.

Strife often gains entrance through a minor issue, something that really doesn't make a difference. For example, a friend makes a passing comment about how she liked our old hairstyle better, and we take offense. But instead of talking about it with the friend and making peace, or extending grace, we choose to replay the words over and over in our minds, feeding our anger, and thereby ushering strife into our life. We continue giving in to strife, and before we know it, we seem constantly enraged.

While strife typically gains entrance into our lives through a person, that isn't always the case. Sometimes our conflict can be with a place. Several years ago I purchased a dress at a store, and the dress fell apart not long afterwards. When I tried to return it, the salesperson refused to take it back. I was very upset because I felt it was unfair, and I told everybody I talked to about this store and their poor customer service. I enthusiastically discouraged anyone who would listen from going there to shop. Every time I passed the store while walking in the shopping mall, I would begin to feel upset. If anyone was with me, I would repeat the story and get even more upset.

God began to show me that I needed to forgive that salesperson and even the dress shop for its policies that did not leave room to meet my need. This was a new level of learning for me regarding forgiveness. I knew about forgiving people, but not places. I learned that being in strife with a place is just as dangerous as being in strife with a person. The only difference is that a place has no feelings, but the effect on the person in strife is just as destructive.

If we fail to recognize and resist strife, it poisons our attitudes and begins to negatively affect all of our relationships—our relationships at school, work, home, and church. What’s worse is that we often have no idea when the problems even started or what to do about them.

This was the case for a woman who approached me after one of my meetings. She told me that after hearing me preach on strife, she had purchased the entire teaching album on strife and began a study of the subject. She said that her family had a long history of conflict and divorces, with brother mad at brother, sister mad at sister, and children hating parents. The night she heard me speak, God revealed to her the cause of the troubled relationships that seemed to plague her and her relatives: they had failed to resist strife. Consequently, family gatherings were filled with dissension and an undercurrent of anger.

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She said that she didn’t want to live in a state of conflict anymore, so she had listened to the tape series and learned to recognize strife and to resist it. Over time, her life and relationships became more peaceful. Not only that, but she also shared what she had learned with many of her relatives, and they had learned to shut the door on strife and conflict as well. One by one many of them were set free because they had learned the truth about the destructive nature of strife. Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32, NKJV).

Confronting Strife, Embracing Peace

Strife spreads like an infection or a highly contagious disease. Many become contaminated and defiled by it. That's why Dave and I work hard to keep it out of our home. Because our personalities are very different, we often do not think alike on issues or see things in the same way. Still, we have learned to talk calmly through our disagreements, being careful not to let pride, resentment, bitterness, jealousy, or anger come between us. When we see symptoms of strife in our relationship, we immediately confront them and restore peace between us.

We also make a concerted effort to keep divisiveness out of Joyce Meyer Ministries. When people come to work for us, we tell them during their training that we will not tolerate strife. We teach them to be aware of the symptoms of strife, such as judgment and criticism, so that they will close the door to strife and learn to take their opinions to the Lord or to the person responsible for their complaint—not to other employees. We train them to walk in love with other employees, being abundant in mercy and quick to overlook an offense. We want our home and our ministry to be places where peace and harmony reign.

Do you?

I pray that by the end of this book you will be so hungry for peace that you will do whatever you need to do to keep strife out of your life. If you must strive at something, strive to keep strife out. Be diligent.

I recently received a letter from a couple who had attended a meeting we hosted in Florida. They wrote that for the first twenty-seven years of their married life, conflict and strife characterized

their relationship. Although they were Christians who loved each other, they had never been able to have peace in their relationship. They bickered, argued, and could not get along. They knew well the truth of Proverbs 17:1: “Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife” (NKJV). Ironically, they were involved in a counseling ministry to married couples at their church, yet they themselves lived under condemnation because they could not do in their lives what they were teaching others.

They wrote: “We reached a breakthrough because of your teaching on strife. We never really knew what the problem was. But now we do, and because of that revelation, we can live in victory.”

Strife does not have to destroy your life. If you desire to walk in victory, do what this couple did. It’s not too late. Learn to recognize the spirit of strife and confront it. Refuse to be fuel for it, so that you can claim the righteousness, peace, and joy that are rightfully yours as a child of God.

Chapter 1

Summary and Reflection



In order to experience peaceful and harmonious relationships, we need to remember that victory over conflict and strife requires us to engage in a spiritual battle. Ephesians 6:12 says, “We are not wrestling with flesh and blood [contending only with physical opponents], but against the despotisms, against the powers, against [the master spirits who are] the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spirit forces of wickedness in the heavenly (supernatural) sphere.”

1. Define *strife* in your own words.

2. We’ve all been in circumstances that are full of tension and conflict. Describe some symptoms of a strife-filled...

Home

Church

Workplace

Other situation

3. Think about the relationships that you struggle with, whether at home (with your parents and siblings, spouse and kids), at school or work, or at church. Ask God to show you where the following characteristics of strife have opened the door for a specific conflict in those relationships. What did you say or think that was motivated by...

Pride (Were you often defensive? Did you insist on having the last word? Were you more interested in making your point than in learning God's perspective on the matter?)

Bitterness (Did you use phrases such as "you always" or "you never," which are symptoms of hidden bitterness?)

Hatred

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Judgment and criticism (Did you assign motives and intentions to another person when it is not possible to really know another's heart? Did you make judgments in other ways?)

Deception and lies (Did you misunderstand the situation from the other person's point of view, or did you form an opinion without knowing all the facts? Did you form opinions based on gossip? Did you lie or bend the truth in any way?)

Anger

Unrest (Did you say or do something out of worry or anxiety?)

Fear and negativity (Did you say or do something out of fear or negativity?)

4. Are you in strife with yourself? Describe how any of the above characteristics apply to your thoughts or how you see yourself.

5. In what ways has conflict and strife brought devastation and destruction into your life?

6. How might your life change if you sought to heal any troubled relationships and resist strife?



Lord, help me to recognize strife and learn to resist it. Help me to see the entrance of the spirit of strife long before it wreaks havoc in my home and life. Supply the grace to me so that I never fuel the spirit of strife in my life or in the lives of others. Amen.