

# Conquering Conflict

**Introduction.** Couples with the best of temperaments will have disagreements. The sad reality is that conflict can and often does destroy a home (Mark 3:25). If you talk to marriage counselors or sociologists, they will tell you that the five major sources of conflict in a marriage are money, sex, in-laws, communication, and children. Maybe you have battled every one of these in your marriage. But the important fact to remember is that they are the major outlets of conflict, not the cause. The primary cause is of virtually every conflict is found in James 4:1. James says that incompatible desires create conflict. He wants this, she wants that. He wants to spend, she wants to save. He likes it hot, she likes it cold.

So how do you respond to those conflicting desires? The first way is my way. I am going to fight until I win. I am going to hold out, I am going to dig in, and you are going to give in. The second way is your way. I will give in and avoid any conflict. Whatever you say, dear, I do not want to talk or argue about it. Someone once told me that regarding conflict resolution they have always found that surrender works pretty well for them. The third way is half-way. You give in half the time, I give in half the time, and we will keep score. The final way is the best way, it is our way. In our way, you set mutual goals and you work together toward their accomplishment.

The greatest need is a discussion of how to remedy conflict. There has never been a marriage that has not had conflict from time to time, so we will investigate six steps to resolving conflict in your marriage. Some marriages here may really be hurting, and my heart goes out to each and every one of them, and I pray that what we cover in this lesson will help your marriage. While you were growing up, how many of you were taught how to resolve conflict? I never was. Learning how to resolve and remedy conflict is one of the most beneficial lessons that we will ever learn in life, so parents, before we begin, make sure you teach these points to your children.

## I. ***Be A Christian***

- A. There is no peace with other people until you have peace with yourself. There is no peace with yourself until you have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 4:23-24). The starting point to resolving conflict is to resolve your conflict with God. Until I let God be the captain of my ship, the internal conflict I experience will spill over to other people. When Jesus Christ lives in me and you, Jesus is not going to fight with Himself. That is why when you see two people who are married to each other and have a deep, mature walk with God, you find very little conflict in their marriage.
- B. Galatians 5:22-23 says that the Spirit will bear fruit in my life. If I am filled with this fruit and my spouse is filled with this fruit, then our

conflicts will be minimal. When I say be a Christian, I do not mean a superficial believer. Gallup, every time he does a poll, says, "90% of all Americans claim to be Christians." Most of them do not even know what the word means. We are not just talking about loosely confessing Him, we are talking about belief, repentance, confession, baptism, and sincere devotion to His cause.

- C. A lot of conflict occurs in marriage when we are looking to another person to meet needs that God wants to meet. When I expect my spouse to meet my needs and they do not meet them, then conflict is going to exist. God wants us to look to Him because there is no other one person in this world who is going to meet all your needs.
  - 1. We foster a wrong notion when we teach our children to look for the "right one." We treat marriage as though there is only one person in the whole world that we could marry and live happily ever after, and the rest of our life is some kind of search and hunt with the hope that we find that right one.
  - 2. Your husband or your wife is designed to meet most of your needs, but your ultimate and deepest needs are met by God alone (Isaiah 64:6; Matthew 20:28; Romans 4:7-8). That is why non-Christians and those who have not really relinquished their lives to God have marriages that are characterized by significantly more conflict.

## II. ***Be Honest And Respectful***

- A. We are commanded to "speak truth" (Ephesians 4:25; Psalm 34:13; Revelation 22:15). It is an imperative that demands a commitment. Throwing a lie into a relationship is like throwing gasoline into a fire.
- B. Furthermore, if lies pervade a marriage, there is no genuine peace between that man and woman. There is a constant uneasiness because there is no trust (Proverbs 12:20). When there is no trust, there is no meaningful relationship. The fact is all of us would have to admit that we have been less than 100% honest with our mate.

## III. ***Analyze The Problem***

- A. If you are in a conflict in your marriage, ask yourself, "How much of this conflict is my fault?" Before you attack, accuse, and blame, check yourself out (Ezekiel 16:52; Matthew 7:3; Ephesians 4:28).
- B. In any relationship, particularly important earthly relationships, when there is a problem, ask yourself, "Am I the problem? Am I oversensitive? Am I insensitive? Am I too demanding? Am I unrealistic? Am I ungrateful?" We are prone to think that our mates were lucky to have married such a perfect person!
- C. Have you noticed that couples fight for the silliest reasons? Why? Because those issues are just catalysts. They have not analyzed the

problem and found out what is behind the silly issue. If you are married, it is not an individual problem, it is a mutual problem.

#### IV. ***Keep It Under Control***

- A. Ephesians 4:26 says God made us with emotion, and He knows there are times when we are going to be angry. This is especially true in a marriage relationship where our feelings and emotions are most vulnerable.
- B. "Angry" is a permissive imperative. God says, "I permit you to be angry, but I do not permit you to sin." This principle goes back to the first step which is to be a Christian. The ability to be angry, but not sin, comes from the power of the gospel. The last fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23 is self-control (2 Peter 1:6). The hardest victory is victory over self, and I have to be under control whenever I deal with conflict.

#### V. ***Deal With Conflict Prudently And Properly***

- A. Conflict does not solve itself. If it is left unresolved, it will just fester under the surface. Most of us are artful dodgers when it comes to conflict. However, the only way to resolve a conflict is to face it.
- B. From the words of Jesus to the writings of Paul, the Bible says if there is a conflict take the initiative and make it right (Matthew 5:23-24; Ephesians 4:27). Choose the right time and the right place, and above everything else, pray. Pray before you enter into a conversation about what is causing disharmony in your home (Nehemiah 2:4; James 1:5).

#### VI. ***Establish Ground Rules***

- A. We have treaties with Russia and China that we are not going to fire nuclear warheads and use chemical warfare with each other. Have we made those treaties with Russia and China because we are in perfect agreement with them? No! But even though we disagree, we can agree not to use certain weapons on each other or the problems are just going to get worse.
- B. The same principle is true in marriage. You must always agree not to use deadly weapons in your marriage or they will do more harm than the problem. In other words, ground rules can help tremendously as you enter into conflict.
  - 1. No grudges. Bitterness is a sour taste left over from the past (Ephesians 4:31; Romans 3:14; Hebrews 12:15). Do not bring the past into current conflicts. If you are dealing with a conflict, deal with the current conflict, not a past one.
  - 2. No yelling. Ephesians 4:31 also says to get rid of wrath and anger. Rage is just an intensified anger that shouts and yells. The worst

- communication in a marriage is when somebody is yelling (Proverbs 15:1).
3. No obscenities. The word "corrupt" in Ephesians 4:29 literally means rotten or putrefied. It amazes me that some people will treat their mates in a way that they would not treat anybody else. You do not need to be talking to your husband or wife in a hateful, obscene way (Matthew 12:36-37). I have no respect for the man or woman who mistreats their mate.
  4. No violence. It is sad to know that domestic violence occurs in one out of four homes. While dishonesty, yelling, and obscenities are the bullets that sometimes critically wound a marriage, physical violence is the nuclear bomb. It destroys everything (Genesis 6:11-13). The most basic ground rule for dealing with conflict in your home is that you will never strike your mate or touch them in a harmful way (Psalm 11:5; 73:3-6; Proverbs 4:14-17).
  5. No personal attacks. Ephesians 4:31 commands you to put away slander (Psalm 50:19-21; Luke 6:45). In other words, you can attack the issue without verbally attacking your mate. Do not insult your partner or critique weaknesses or personality traits that have nothing to do with the conflict at hand.
  6. Be discreet. The final sin Ephesians 4:31 warns against is malice. There are a lot of ways you can show malice, but when you verbally swing at your mate in public, then your malice is really showing. That swing can take the form of an open, bold embarrassment, or a cold, calculated sarcasm. A public place is no place to publish your conflicts. If you are one of those people who likes to take little digs at your mate, or maybe you sometimes explode in a church foyer or a supermarket, you are not only damaging your mate, but you are also alienating your friends. Malice makes you repulsive to be around (1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 2:1-2).
  7. Be kind. Always in a point of dealing with conflict, treat your mate at least as well as you would any other person (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12; Proverbs 31:26).

**Conclusion.** Stan Mikita, a professional hockey star in the '60s and '70s, used to get into a lot of fights during games. He stopped when his eight-year-old daughter asked a very grown-up question: "How can you score goals when you're always in the penalty box, Daddy?" It is very hard to build a wonderful relationship when there is constant fighting (Proverbs 17:1; Ecclesiastes 4:6).

Do you want to have a satisfying marriage, or do you want to just pretend that you are having a satisfying marriage? Please remember that it is far more rewarding to resolve a conflict than it is to dissolve a marriage

(Proverbs 15:32). Abigail Van Buren said, "People who fight fire with fire usually end up with ashes."