

THE MISSIONAL MARRIAGE STUDY

Session #7 – Conflict Resolution

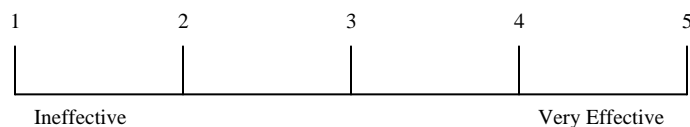
Conflict is inevitable. The difference between any two couples is not whether there is conflict, but how well the couple deals with it when it surfaces. Resolving conflict in marriage is crucial to producing greater communication and understanding within your marriage- and as a result, better allowing your marriage to move forward in fulfilling the mission of God!

Top 5 Reasons for Conflict:

- 1.) Failure in Communication
- 2.) Financial Difficulties
- 3.) Sexual Difficulties
- 4.) Problems with In-Laws
- 5.) Disagreements about Child-Rearing

Recognizing Conflict (recap of ideas from Session #6):

- As a child, what were you taught, and by whom, about how to deal with people you had trouble getting along with?
- What kinds of factors can tend to lead to conflict within a marriage?
- What are some ways that personality differences can cause strife in marriage?
- Knowing that values and philosophies can also lead to conflict in marriage, what are some issues that couples often have different views on?
- Men: What are some things that men typically find difficult to understand about women? What are some misunderstandings we have about women?
- Women: What are some things that women typically find difficult to understand about men? What are some misunderstandings women have about men?
- Read **Ephesians 4:26-27**... When does anger become sin?
- What does it mean to not let the sun go down while you are still angry?
- What effect does unresolved conflict have on a relationship? How might this “give the devil a foothold?”
- What do you remember learning from your parents about handling conflict- good or bad?
- What are some common sources of conflict in your marriage?
- What effects has unresolved conflict had on your marriage?
- When conflicts arise in your marriage, how do they generally affect you?
- Thinking about how you and your spouse relate to each other, how would you rate your effectiveness in handling conflict? (circle one)



- What effect, positive and negative – would you say conflict has had on your marriage?
- What is one thing you appreciate about how your spouse handles conflict in your marriage?
- If you could change one thing about how you handle conflict, what would it be?
- Read the following passages on peace... **Psalm 34:12-14; Isaiah 26:3; Romans 12:17-18; Romans 14:17-19; Colossians 3:15; Hebrews 12:14**
- Read **John 14:27**... How is what Jesus offers different from what the world gives?
- According to these verses... **Romans 5:1; Colossians 1:19-20; Ephesians 2:14-16**... How can we experience the peace of God?
- In achieving lasting peace in marriage, what advantage, do Christians have over non-Christians?

5 ELEMENTS NECESSARY TO CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF HEALTHY CONFLICT RESOLUTION:

1. Transparency
2. Listening
3. Confrontation
4. Forgiving
5. Response

1.) Transparency:

- When you hear the word “transparency,” what are some other words that come to mind? How can these words, when applied to marriage, be helpful?
- Why is it often difficult to be transparent with others, even those who are closest to us?
- Most people marry with the hope of being transparent, of openly sharing their thoughts and feelings with each other. In what ways is this hope of transparency damaged in many relationships?
- Why do couples feel the need for transparency in marriage?
- Look at your spouse and complete this sentence: “The best part of being known so well by you is...”
- Complete this sentence: “Being known so well by you is difficult for me because...”
- What is difficult for you about your spouse knowing you so well?

4 Steps toward Transparency:

1. Be open with God (**Psalm 139:23-24**)
2. Create an atmosphere of love, commitment, and forgiveness in your home (**Colossians 3:12-14**)
3. Affirm your spouse when he or she practices transparency (**Proverbs 16:24**)
4. Pray regularly with one another (**Colossians 4:2**)

5 Levels of Communication: (Adapted from John Powell’s “*Why I Am Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?*”)

1. Cliché – Impersonal greetings and introductory comments
 2. Facts – Sharing what you know
 3. Opinions – Sharing what you think
 4. Emotions – Sharing what you feel
 5. Transparency – Sharing who you are
- Evaluate where you think your communication most consistently dwells on each of those levels...
 - What might be one step you could take to move toward greater transparency?
 - In what ways has your spouse’s love and understanding helped you to be more transparent? Think of some specific instances...
 - Describe a recent situation in which criticism or advice from your spouse stifled your transparency...
 - As you become more transparent in your relationship, what result of benefit would you expect in your marriage?

2.) Listening:

Project: Write a list of 8 things (in the left column) you would like your spouse to pick up for you at the store... (forget the diet, this is your wish list!). Be specific. (i.e. – a half gallon of 2% milk)...

- | | |
|----|-----------|
| 1. | 1. |
| 2. | 2. |
| 3. | 3. etc... |

Then, stand back to back with your spouse, and read aloud the list that you wrote. (Read your list only once!). After each of you has shared your list, sit down with no help from your spouse, write down the eight things you were supposed to get from the store (you can write these next to your list).

Now, write a new list of 8 grocery items (these should be different from the items on your first list. Get with your spouse again, but this time stand facing one another and go through your lists. You can ask questions or have your spouse repeat an item, if needed. Then, on your own, write the things from the new list that you are supposed to get at the store.

- | | |
|----|-----------|
| 1. | 1. |
| 2. | 2. |
| 3. | 3. etc... |

- In comparison to the first time that you tried to remember what was on your spouse's list, how did you do the second time around?
- What made the difference?
- What is the difference between hearing and listening?
- What might be some examples of poor listening habits?
- How do poor listening habits create conflict?
- What are some instances in which you did a poor job listening to your spouse? How did it affect your relationship?
- What could you have done to listen better?
- Read **Proverbs 15:1...** What guidance would this verse give you in that situation?
- Read **James 1:19...** What do you think would happen in a marriage relationship if a husband and wife consistently applied these words?
- How can taking the time to stop and listen help you avoid a conflict?
- How can you tell when your spouse really listens to you? In what ways does that help strengthen your relationship?
- Part of being a good listener involves maintaining a teachable heart... Read the following passages... **Proverbs 1:5; Luke 11:28...** How can listening to God help you become a better listener with your spouse?

Key Elements to becoming a More Focused Listener:

- 1.) Picking the proper time and place
- 2.) Making sure that no distractions exist
- 3.) Maintaining good eye contact
- 4.) Allowing enough time to work through the conflict

Individual Evaluation:

- 1.) As your spouse talks to you, do you find it difficult to keep your mind from wandering to other things? (*Y, N, Sometimes*)
- 2.) When your spouse talks, do you go beyond the facts being discussed and try to sense how he or she feels about the matter?
(*Y, N, Sometimes*)
- 3.) Do certain things or phrases your spouse says prejudice you so that you cannot objectively listen to what is being said? (*Y, N, Sometimes*)
- 4.) When you are puzzled or annoyed by what your spouse says, do you try to get the questions straightened out as soon as possible?
(*Y, N, Sometimes*)
- 5.) If you believe it would take too much time and effort to understand something, do you go out of your way to avoid hearing about it?
(*Y, N, Sometimes*)
- 6.) When your spouse talks to you, do you try to make him or her think you are paying attention when you are not? (*Y, N, Sometimes*)
- 7.) When you listen to your spouse, are you easily distracted by outside sights and sounds (such as the TV, someone walking by, or music)?
(*Y, N, Sometimes*)
- 8.) What are some practical steps you can take to become a better listener?

Rules of Listening... (Adapted from Tommy Nelson's "*The Book of Romance*")

- 1.) With Patience Until Your spouse Speaks
- 2.) With your Face
- 3.) Until Your Spouse has finished speaking
- 4.) Listen and then file away what you hear in the closet of privacy
- 5.) Without rude body language

3.) Confronting:

As a couple, decide how you would respond in the following situations...

- A. You are at the store and notice someone shoplifting
 - B. You observe a coworker repeatedly taking home office supplies
 - C. Your in-laws keep dropping by unexpectedly
 - D. Your spouse has promised to be home at a certain time, but arrives 30 minutes late
- How is confrontation in marriage different from confrontation with a stranger, family, or at work?

Typical Patterns of Conflict in Marriage:

- 1.) Fight to Win – *“I-win-you-lose-because-I’m-right-you’re-wrong”*
 - 2.) Withdrawal – *“I’m-uncomfortable-so-I’ll-pull-away”*
 - 3.) Yield – *“rather-than-start-another-argument-whatever-you-wish-is-fine-with-me”*
 - 4.) Loving Confrontation – *“I-care-enough-about-our-relationship-to-deal-with-the-issue-as-it-really-is”*
- What is your usual pattern of handling conflict in these environments? (Work, Friends, Family, Marriage?)
 - How has your pattern of dealing with conflict changed over time?
 - What factors would you say most influence your approach to handling conflict?
 - How do you think your pattern affects your spouse?
 - According to **Genesis 3:8-10...** How did Adam and Eve respond to their conflict with God? Which of the patterns did Adam employ?
 - In what ways do couples respond to each other like Adam and Eve did to God?
 - Read **Mark 15:9-15...** In this situation, Pilate had a decision to make. What did Pilate do to resolve the conflict with the crowd?
 - What problems does this approach create in a marriage?
 - Read **1 Samuel 20:33...** Here, King Saul had discovered his son was befriendng David. What was Paul’s apparent pattern for handling conflict?
 - What is the danger in marriage with this kind of response?
 - Read **Luke 10:38-42...** How did Jesus deal with conflict in this situation?
 - What does it take to react like Jesus did here?

Steps Toward Loving Confrontation:

- 1.) Look Inward (**Galatians 6:1-2; Matthew 7:3-5**)
- 2.) Pick the Right Time and Place (**Proverbs 25:11**)
- 3.) Speak the Truth in Love (**Ephesians 4:15-16; 1 Corinthians 13:4-5**)

6 Stages of Conflict: (adapted from Tommy Nelson’s *“The Book of Romance”*)

- 1.) Both parties feel harmed
- 2.) A change of heart
- 3.) Reaching out to make amends
- 4.) Communication
 - a. Never Speak Harshly
 - b. Never Confront Your Mate Publicly
 - c. Never Use Other People “as weapons” in the Conflict
 - d. Never Say “Never” or “Always”
 - e. Never Resort to Name Calling
 - f. Never Get Historical
 - g. Never Stomp Out of the Room or Leave
 - h. Never Raise Your Voice in Anger
 - i. Never Win Through Reasoning or Logic – and Never Out-Argue
 - j. Never be Condescending
 - k. Never Demean
 - l. Never Arouse Your Spouse With “You” Statements
 - m. Never Allow an Argument to Begin if Both of You are Overly Tired, If One of You is Under the Influence of Chemicals, or If One of You is Physically Ill
 - n. Never Touch or Grab Your Spouse in a Harmful Manner
- 5.) Forgiveness
- 6.) Greater Closeness and Joy

4.) Forgiving:

- When you were a child, who taught you the most about what forgiveness is? How did this person teach you?
- From your childhood, when was a time you especially remember having to say “I’m Sorry”
- Other than Christ, who do you look to as an example of a forgiving person?
- What would you say it means to forgive another person?
- Think about a time when you received forgiveness from another person for something you did. How did you feel before and after you received forgiveness?
- Why is understanding the forgiveness of Christ so essential in a marriage relationship?
- Read **Matthew 6:14-15** and **Matthew 18:21-22...** What is profound about what Jesus says about forgiveness?
- Read **Luke 15:11-24...** What steps did the prodigal son take to seek forgiveness from his father?
- Why is each of these steps important in the process of receiving forgiveness?
- Generally speaking, do you find it easier to ask your spouse for forgiveness or to extend forgiveness to your spouse? (explain)
- Why is it often so difficult to request forgiveness or grant forgiveness in marriage?

Steps to Granting Forgiveness:

- 1.) Give up the right of punishment (**Ephesians 4:17, 22-24, 31-32**)
 - 2.) Yield yourself to the control of the Holy Spirit (**Romans 8:5-6, 12-14**)
 - 3.) Choose not to dwell on the past (**Isaiah 43:18-19**)
- What is something you recall your spouse doing that was his or her attempt to “make up?”
 - What are some creative ideas for ways that you can make up with your spouse?
 - Read **Ephesians 4:32...** How can you apply “forgiving... just as Christ God forgave you” when...
 1. you think about things your spouse has done to you in the past?
 2. you want to remind your spouse of a way he or she has hurt you in the past?

5.) Replacing Natural Reactions with Supernatural Responses:

- Think through this past week... what are some insults you heard others speak? Now think of an uplifting, positive blessing that was spoken...
- Which was easier to think of- and insult or a blessing?
- How does it feel to receive a word of blessing from your spouse?
- Read **1 Peter 3:8-9**... What does “repay evil with evil or insult with insult” mean? What does it look like in a marriage relationship?
- Read **1 Peter 2:23**... Describe how Christ responded to insult? To what extent do you think we are to follow Christ’s example? (explain)
- When have you seen an insult for insult type of response in your marriage?
- What situations or circumstances tend to provoke this type of response for you?
- Read **1 Peter 3:8-9** again... What does it mean to repay with a blessing? What example comes to mind?
- Read **Luke 6:27-28** and **Romans 12:14-21**... What additional insights do you gain from these verses about giving a blessing from these challenging passages?
- Why is giving a blessing after an insult often so difficult?

3 Steps for Establishing a Blessing Relationship: (**1 Peter 3:10-11**)

- 1.) Keep your tongue from evil
 - 2.) Turn from evil and do good
 - 3.) Seek peace and pursue it
- Read **Philippians 2:3-8**... This is about giving a blessing adopted an attitude of regarding a person more important than you are. What are some examples of how you could give a blessing by doing what you spouse wants instead of what you want?

HOMEWORK: Take the time with your spouse to work through these 5 elements together, and evaluate how well each of these 5 areas is fostered in your marriage. Understand that when each of these areas are nurtured in your home on a consistent basis, conflict (or at least the level of conflict) can be dramatically reduced. Determine intentional steps you and your spouse can take to better foster transparency, listening, healthy confrontation, forgiveness, and responsiveness in your marriage and conflict. Spend some time in prayer together, asking God to guard your home and make it one of peace, instead of strife.

In addition, take some time to tell your spouse how much they mean to you, and how thankful you are for them- and ask for forgiveness in any areas where you may have fallen short as a wife or husband to them!