

Avoiding the Deadly Sins of Marriage Why Is There Such Conflict Between Us?

How To Turn Conflict into Growth
Grace Fellowship Church / Pastor Brad Bigney / Oct. 26, 2003

“Do you have any conflict in your life? Do you experience moments of extreme irritation toward someone you otherwise love? Are there people who simply push your buttons more than others? Do certain things drive you crazy on a daily basis? Did you have a lot of conflict last year? How about last month? Last week? So far today? If you could watch the video of a typical week in your life, you would recognize an astonishing amount of conflict going on around you. Conflict is one of the principal effects of the Fall, and it doesn't take much to incite it.” *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul David Tripp, p. 75-76

“Why does it seem that people, things, and situations are in our way? Why do we seldom go through a day without some experience of conflict? The answer to all of these questions is that we think of our lives as our own, and we are more committed to the purposes of our own kingdom than we are to God's. We need to recognize that the people in our way have been sent to us by a wise and sovereign King. He never gets a wrong address and always chooses just the right moment to expose our hearts and realign them to His.” *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul David Tripp, p. 106 & 107

I. Start COMMUNICATING Instead of Retaliating

Rule #1 Be honest -Eph. 4:15 “Speak the truth in love”

- a. God Commands us to speak ... it's not an option
- b. God Commands us to speak the Truth
- c. God Commands us to speak the truth in Love

Prov. 12:18 “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Prov. 29:20 “Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

Prov. 15:28 “The wise man ponders (studies) how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked spouts evil words.”

Rule #2 Stay Current -Eph. 4:26 “Don't let the sun go down on your wrath”

Eph. 4:26-27 “Be angry and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil”

God commands us to keep short accounts with each other. Don't let things build up. Don't let things drag on. Deal with problems in your relationship as quickly as possible. The sooner the conversation can take place the more likely you'll both be able to recall more accurately what happened and what was said.

Rule #3. Attack the problem not the person -Eph. 4:29 “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers...”

Rule #4 Act, don't react! -Eph 4:31-32

II. Keep PERSEVERING Instead of Persecuting Each Other

To persevere you need to have your eye fixed on something other than your spouse – and what they're doing that you don't like. If you're focus is wrong – you'll lose heart in a weekend – and you won't be

able to endure. You have to have your eye fixed on the same thing that Jesus had His eye fixed on when He went through suffering and pain.

Heb. 12:1-3 “Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”

Some of you are so battle weary! And you’re discouraged... you’ve lost heart... and your ready to quit – but it’s because you’re eyes are fixed on the wrong thing. You’ve had your eyes fixed on your spouse... and their sin... and the ways they’re hurting you... and your eyes are fixed on your shattered dream... and your disappointments. And you can’t run the race that way.

Fix your eyes on Jesus... and the same joy that He fixed His eyes on – the joy of pleasing the Father... the joy of hearing Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

2 Cor. 5:9 “Therefore we make it our aim, whether absent or present in the body, to be pleasing to Him.”

Heb. 10:35-39 *New Living* “Do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord, no matter what happens. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so you will continue to do God’s will. Then you will receive all that He has promised. ‘For in just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. And a righteous person will live by faith. But I will have no pleasure in anyone who turns away.’ But we are not like those who turn their backs on God...”

Gary Thomas writes, “So often it isn't that our marriages are either good or bad - they just are. We get tired of the routine and the sameness, and our souls occasionally grow numb toward each other. Kathleen and Thomas Hart depict it this way: "Marriage is a long walk two people take together. Sometimes the terrain is very interesting, sometimes rather dull. At times the walk is arduous, for both persons or for one. Sometimes the conversation is lively; at other times, there is not much to say." Hart and Hart, *The First Two Years of Marriage*, 15, quoted in *Sacred Marriage*, Gary Thomas, p. 106

Some of you aren’t struggling because of conflict. You’re struggling because of sameness and routine. You’ve got this nagging feeling that you’ve missed the storybook marriage dream that the world talks about. You feel left out – and have the nagging suspicion that you’re marriage doesn’t have what everybody else seems to have.

Watch out! Don’t buy that lie. Every marriage has high points and low points. Breathtaking scenery and mundane. Riveting excitement and routine. But take a phrase from Eugene Peterson’s discipleship book every godly marriage should be a ‘Long obedience in the same direction.’ Just keep going forward by God’s grace – obeying Him... following Him... no matter how feel on any given day.

“ Marriage isn't an amusement park that you exit as soon as the fun comes to a stop. It's a relationship you believe in enough to stick around until the fun returns. ” —Martha Bolton quoted in *Marriage Partnership*, Spr 2001, page 12

III. You Need to Start DEALING With Your OWN HEART Instead of Defending Your Own Ways

Psa. 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

James 4:1-4 “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your own pleasures.”

James is connecting our conflicts with other people to the internal war that’s going on in our own hearts. If my heart is ruled by a certain desire, there are only two ways I can respond to you. If you are helping me get what I want, I will be happy with you. But if you stand in my way, I will be angry, frustrated, and discouraged when I am with you. There will be times when I will wish you weren't in my life.

Affects my relationship
to other people

Desire → Demand → Need → Expectation → Disappointment
“I Wish” “I Will!” “I Must” “You Should!” “You didn’t...”



Spirals down into...

Punishment

“Because you didn’t now I will...”
or “Because you didn’t now I won’t...”

Taken from Paul Tripp’s book *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hand*

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

(These communication guidelines were provided by Timothy Keller.)

Proverbs 18:21; 25:11; Job 19:2; James 3:8-10; I Peter 3:10; Ephesians 4:25-32

Think about the guidelines and study the supporting Scripture verses. Rate yourself on each of these items: Excellent (3), Good (2), Fair (1), Poor (0).

1. *Be a ready listener* and do not answer until the other person has finished talking (Prov. 18:13; James 1:19). ____
2. *Be slow to speak.* Think first. Don't be hasty in your words. Speak in such a way that the other person can understand and accept what you say (Prov. 15:23,28; 29:20; James 1:19). ____
3. *Don't go to bed angry!* Each day clear the offenses of that day. Speak the truth always, but do it in love. Do not exaggerate (Eph. 4:15, 25; Col. 3:8; Matt. 6:34). ____
4. *Do not use silence to frustrate the other person.* Explain why you are hesitant to talk at this time (Prov. 15:28; 16:21,23; 10:1-9; 18:2; Col. 4:6; Prov. 20:15). ____
5. *Do not become involved in quarrels.* It is possible to disagree without quarreling (Prov. 17:14; 20:3; Rom. 13:13; Eph. 4:31). ____
6. *Do not respond in uncontrolled anger.* Use a soft and kind response and tone of voice (Prov. 14:29; 15:1; 25:15; 29:11; Eph. 4:26, 31). ____
7. *When you are in the wrong, admit it and ask for forgiveness* and ask how you can change (James 5:16; Prov. 12:15; 16:2; 21:2, 29; 20:6; Matt. 5:23-25; Luke 17:3). ____
8. *When someone confesses to you, tell him/her you forgive him/her.* Be sure it is forgiven and not brought up to the person, to others, or to *yourself!* (Prov. 17:9; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; I Pet. 4:8). _____
9. Avoid nagging (Prov. 10:19; 17:9; 16:21, 23; 18:6, 7; 27:15; 21:19). ____
10. Do not blame or criticize the other person. *Instead, restore . . . encourage . . . edify* (Rom. 14:13; Gal. 6:1; I Thess. 5:11).
11. If someone verbally attacks, criticizes, or blames you, do not respond in the same manner (Rom. 12:17, 21; I Pet. 2:23; 3:9). _____
12. Try to understand the other person's opinion. *Make allowances for differences* (Prov. 18:2, 13, 15; Phil. 3:15, 16). ____
13. Be concerned about the interests of others (Phil. 2:3; Eph. 4:2; Rom. 12:15). ____

Reflect on the 13 guidelines for communication above and:

- *List the items that you most need to work on changing.*
- *Write down two specific actions you can take to improve these items.*
- *Share these with your mate and ask for help in changing. Get other suggestions concerning how you can improve these items. If you do not have a mate, share with a close Christian friend.*

CONFLICT & COMMUNICATION WORKSHEET

- A. List five things that you could discuss with your mate. Now plunge in and seek a good time to actually communicate.
- B. Evaluate your conversation. (Perhaps you should make a tape recording of some of your ordinary family conversation. Then listen to yourself.) Answer the following questions about your conversation by using this rating scale:

0 = never, 1 = seldom, 2 = sometimes, 3 = frequently, 4 = always. Circle the questions where improvement is needed.

1. Do you really show an interest in what others are saying (——) or are you interested only in what you are talking about? _____
2. Are you a know-it-all? _____
3. Is your voice pleasant, gentle, and friendly? _____
4. Do you say things clearly and simply so that others can understand? ___ Are you lovingly honest or evasive and untrue? _____ Are you open or secretive?_____ Do you often send backdoor messages? _____
5. Are you predominantly appreciative and affirmative (——) or critical and negative? _____
6. Do you encourage others (___) or belittle them? _____
7. Is your family better because of your involvement with them?_____ How?
8. Does your family feel free to be honest and open with you? _____ Is it safe for them to tell you the truth about you as they see it (——) or do they have to fear speaking the truth to you? _____
 9. Do you tend to dominate a conversation in which you are involved? _____ Do you ever "whip into silence" by your tone or reaction? _____
10. Are you willing to listen to opinions that are different from yours and not be threatened by them? ___ Are you a highly opinionated, prejudiced person? _____
11. When others want to talk to you, do you give them your undivided attention (___) or are you usually too busy? _____
12. Do you consider communication with your family to be a priority matter? ___ Is it more important to you than watching TV? _____ Than reading the newspaper? _____ Than going fishing? _____ Than taking a nap? ___ If you had to choose between talking to your family and doing one of the aforementioned things, would you usually choose talking to your family? _____
13. Are you often not in the mood to talk? _____ Do you give in to your moods (___) or deny yourself and focus on the "needs of others? _____
14. Are you frequently sarcastic and nasty in your speech (——) or do you usually use wholesome gracious, considerate, and respectful speech? _____
15. Are you usually cheerful and bright (——) or overly serious and somber? _____ Do you usually have a merry heart (——) or a sullen spirit? _____
16. Do you nag? _____
17. Do you lecture or moralize? _____•

18. Do you sometimes exaggerate problems, or the other person's faults, etc? ____
19. Do you sometimes mindread, read into the other' person's words- and accuse him/her of meaning things he/she didn't really say? ____
20. Do you insist on having the last word? ____
21. Do you make time to communicate on a daily basis? ____
22. Do you often bring up the other person's past mistakes? ____

GUIDELINES FOR GOOD CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS

This exercise will help you discern the kind of marriage partners the two of you may be. It is a list of what you and your partner should be doing when you have disagreements.

Read each statement. Then on the blank lines, record the number that corresponds to how often you and your partner practice this biblical rule for effective conflict resolution. Use this scale:

"I never do this"	= 4	"I seldom do this"	= 1
"I sometimes do this"	= 3	"I frequently do this"	= 0
"I always do this"	= 2		

YOU PARTNER

1. When a disagreement or problem arises, I focus on what is happening and what I should do to correct it instead of trying to understand what my partner does.
2. When a problem arises, I am ready to admit that I may be part of the problem. I focus on what I am doing wrong, rather than on what my partner is doing wrong.
3. I realize I cannot change my partner; that he/she must want to change or all my efforts will compound the problem rather than solve the problem.
4. I realize that love is not primarily a feeling, but actions calculated to serve, please and help my partner in a God-honoring way.
5. I focus my attention on changing my own behavior, attitudes, reactions and responses toward my partner. I plan specific, attainable, repeatable, positive changes I can make.
6. I am constantly working to develop and maintain a good communication system. I know that relationships are hindered when there is no communication or the wrong kind of communication.
7. I am working to develop and maintain many commonalities with my partner, including common projects, common interests and common recreational activities. I do a variety of activities with him/her. I am creative in the expression of my love and appreciation of him/her.
8. I recognize and allow for differences between my partner and me. I know men and women tend to view things differently.
9. I regularly practice the Golden Rule as stated in Matthew 7:12. I treat my partner as I want to be treated.
10. I major on the positive qualities of my partner and our relationship rather than focus on the negative. I emphasize our commonalities rather than our differences. (Philippians 4:8)
11. I practice the principle laid down in Luke 6:34-35. I give and serve, expecting nothing in return.
12. I keep current. I deal with one problem at a time. I don't continue to have reruns on arguments from the past. I forgive and forget. (Matthew 6:34; Ephesians 4:26)
13. I try to maintain a close relationship with God through Jesus Christ. (John 14:6; I John 4:21; Matthew 22:37-39; Ephesians 5:21-33)

After you finish this exercise, count the number of 0 and 1 answers you gave and mark the number on the appropriate line below. Next, count the number of answers with the numbers 2,3 or 4. Record that number on the appropriate line below.

	YOU	PARTNER
Number of 0 and 1 answers	_____	_____
Number of 2,3 and 4 answers	_____	_____

This exercise describes thirteen principles for good conflict resolution in your relationship with your partner and in your dealings with other people. It describes how you can be the kind of marriage partner God wants you to be. If you honestly answered several of the statements with a 2, 3 or 4, plan how you can change in order to answer those statements with a 0 or a 1. The more 0's and 1s you have, the better will be your relationship with your partner and with others.