

# Growing Through Conflict

## I. Biblical Perspective on Conflict

### A. Conflict can only be resolved by the Gospel.

- The basis for resolving any conflict is Christ, the Gospel – NOT trying harder, learning a new technique.

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

### B. Conflict is inevitable. Don't be surprised when it happens because you are one sinner married to another.

- “As sinners, we naturally contend for our presumed self-interest...Warmaking is a prime trait of sinners.” (David Powlison)
- Differences between you and your spouse are inevitable. You have different strengths and weaknesses, life experiences, likes and dislikes. God made you different on purpose and brought you both together.

### C. Conflict reveals a sinful craving in my heart. (James 4:1-4)

- “One of the joy's of biblical counseling comes when you are able to turn on the lights in another person's dark room. I have yet to meet a couple locked in hostility who really understood their motives. James 4:1 teaches that CRAVINGS UNDERLIE CONFLICT. Couples who see what rules them – cravings for affection, attention, power

vindication, control, comfort, a hassle free life – can repent and begin to learn how to make peace” (David Powlison)

- “Our cravings rule our lives; they directly compete with God Himself for lordship.” (David Powlison)

D. **Conflicts are opportunities therefore seize them.** God sovereignly allows conflicts to take place to make us more like Christ. (Romans 8:28-29)

- God is at work in your circumstances by his Spirit to make you more like Christ. Therefore you can view conflicts as opportunities to grow through adversity, not unpleasant interruptions in your life.

E. **A working definition of conflict** (taken from “Bringing the Gospel to Bear in Conflict by Andy Farmer)

- “Conflict is a disruption of peace that results when we willingly deny the Gospel to pursue the cravings of the heart through worldly means.”

## II. Humility is Required to Resolve a Conflict

A. **Humble yourself before God.**

i. In any conflict, our sin is first and foremost against God. When sinful cravings rule our hearts, we are actively opposing God.

- “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37)
- “All idols [sinful cravings] are objects of the heart’s self-centered affections (Ezekiel 14:3). Whatever we trust in or love is an idol if it replaces the true God.” (Ed Welch)

ii. God actively gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6)

- “James 4:6 makes a staggering promise: God gives more grace...God gives grace to the humble. Grace is

more and greater than our sin. When god-players admit the truth, they find amazing grace in Jesus: forgiveness, mercy, sanity, a fresh start, cleansing, power, freedom.” (David Powlison)

iii. Confess your sins to God and receive forgiveness for your sins. (1 John 1:9)

- “As verse 9 teaches us, true confession of sin asks for and anticipates forgiveness...Forgiveness absolves us from the punishment of sin which we deserve. Cleansing frees us from its pollution...Every one of our sins can be covered by the death of Christ...For the same cross that pardons promises power to live differently.” (David Jackman)

**B. Humble yourself before your spouse.** (Matthew 7:1-5a)

i. Begin by looking at your own heart.

- Our temptation is to focus on our spouse’s sins.
- Here are some questions you can ask yourself and have your spouse ask you to understand the cravings of your heart:
  1. What do I desire, crave, want that I am not getting?
  2. What am I demanding?
  3. What do I think that I need?
  4. What am I fearing?
  5. What am I loving more than my spouse?

ii. Confess your sins. (See Addendum)

- Be specific. You should not only ask forgiveness for your actions, but your attitudes and words as well.

- Ask for forgiveness. Just saying, “I’m sorry” is insufficient. Where there has been sin, we need to ask for forgiveness.

**C. Humbly help your spouse.** (Matthew 7:5c)

i. Begin by eagerly extending forgiveness.

- “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

ii. We need to posture ourselves to help our spouse when they are in sin. Let us come with questions, not conclusions.

- “When you go to confront someone about their sin, it should be about engaging their heart, not declaring their sin.” (Ken Sande)

iii. Get others involved.

### **III. How Do We Know We Are Reconciled**

- A. Agreement about the issues and what went wrong.
- B. Confession of sin and extension of forgiveness if necessary.
- C. “Forgetting” the offense: “I will not use this offense against you in my future thoughts of you or in our future conflicts.”
- D. A restoration of ease and intimacy with one another.

### **IV. Men, You Have the Privilege to Lead In Resolving Conflict**

- A. Lead by bringing the Gospel to bear in every aspect of your life together. (Colossians 1:11-14)
- B. Lead in an understanding way. It takes effort to do this. (1 Peter 3:7, Psalm 103)

- C. Lead in biblical fellowship with your wife and others. Regularly invite your wife's input into your life. (James 5:16)

## **Addendum: Seven A's of Confession**

*(Taken from "The Peacemaker" by Ken Sande)*

### **1. Address Everyone Involved**

- Confess to each person who has been directly affected by your wrongdoing.

### **2. Avoid If, But, and Maybe**

- Make a conscious effort to avoid using words that dilute your confession, excuse your conduct, or shift blame to others.

### **3. Admit Specifically**

- Don't hide behind vague admissions or general statements that cloud or minimize what you did. Specifically identify your sinful attitudes (pride, selfishness, envy, bitterness, anger, ingratitude, etc.) and actions.

### **4. Acknowledge the Hurt**

- Admit that your actions hurt the other person and express sorrow for the pain you have caused. Give the person an opportunity to explain how he or she was affected by your actions.

### **5. Accept the Consequences**

- Make it clear that you intend to accept full responsibility for what you have done. This may require honoring previous commitments, making restitution, or suffering the loss of certain benefits or privileges.

## **6. Alter Your Behavior**

- Commit to changing your behavior in the future with God's help. You may even ask the person you wronged to pray for you and to let you know when you are slipping back into your old ways.

## **7. Ask for Forgiveness (and Allow Time)**