

Marriage Enrichment



Lesson Topic: Healthy Conflict

Week One Homework

Conflict in marriage is inevitable but the Lord uses conflict as part of our sanctification process. You and your spouse are both sinners. Sin brings conflict, but through Jesus Christ we can have victory over our sin and our hearts can change with His help. It is possible to have God-honoring, healthy conflict resolution in our marriages and in our other relationships. Healthy conflict resolution takes time, effort, prayer, and dependency upon the Lord. The source of conflict is in our own hearts because of our sin nature. It is first a vertical problem between you and the Lord, not a horizontal problem between you & your spouse. You must surrender your thoughts and motivations on a daily basis to keep them from saying, “It is all about me and what I want!” and replace them with “It is all about God and glorifying Him!”

The homework and Small Group discussion time for this week will help you better understand the four conflict styles that you learned at Large Group, how we each respond to conflict, and how we may hurt our spouses during conflict. You will have the opportunity to discuss and agree on your own “Rules of Engagement” that you will abide by when conflict arises in your marriage.

Scripture Memory Verse:

"Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger." James 1:19

In the Word Together (read and discuss the following verses with your spouse):

What do the following verses teach you about conflict in your marriage as being inevitable and a vertical problem - not a problem with your spouse?

- Galatians 5:17

- James 4:1-3

- Ephesians 6:12

Talk About It Together:

Refer back to your notes from Large Group. Discuss the following questions with your spouse and write down your shared responses. Remember that transparency and openness in your marriage is developed by creating and being a safe place for your spouse to express his/her thoughts. This is especially important when talking about potentially emotional issues – such as how you handle conflict together.

1. What was one thing that you learned at Large Group that you want to personally improve in how you handle conflict with your spouse?

2. In large group you were taught about four conflict styles:

- Shark -- Peace Breaker (assertive, aggressive, attacks the person, argumentative, very competitive, loves to fight, there is a clear winner and loser, delivers “truth” without any gentleness or grace, uses manipulation)
- Turtle -- Peace Faker (evasive, pretends everything is always ok, acts like “all is well”, hides from conflict, minimizes the truth or reality to avoid conflict, tends to say “it is what it is” and lets the issue go, excuses other’s behavior or justifies their actions, stuffs conflict down inside, sarcastic)
- Puffer Fish -- Self-vindicator (defensive, lashes out, conflict is perceived as a personal attack, twists other person’s words, likes to say “it’s not my fault”, self-justification, less concerned about who they hurt or how they hurt others, “hurt people hurt others”)
- Teddy Bear -- Peace Keeper (peace at all costs, appears to be self-sacrificing, passive in conflict, plays the scapegoat, martyr attitude, don’t express true emotions, you can win so that you will like me once again, intense unexpressed feelings, volcanic reaction when they finally “erupt” and the teddy bear turns into the grizzly bear)

- a) Which of the four conflict styles do you think represents you the closest (you may be a blend of styles)? What characteristics made you choose the style(s) that you chose? Do you agree with the conflict style that your spouse thinks represent him/her? How do you respond to his/her conflict style?

- b) How do your styles of conflict manifest themselves when you have conflict with your spouse? How do your conflict styles fuel each other?

3. The way that we handle conflict with our spouse can be impacted by what was modeled for us by our parents. We can bring these learned patterns into our own marriage.
- a) Thinking of the four conflict styles above and conflict resolution in general, what specific positive ways of resolving conflict were modeled for you by your parents that you would like to follow in your marriage?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- b) Thinking of the four conflict styles above and conflict resolution in general, what specific negative ways of handling conflict were modeled for you by your parents that you are trying to avoid in your marriage (if any)? Have you brought any of these negative ways of handling conflict into your marriage? What will you do to change these patterns to improve the ways that you handle conflict and resolve it with your spouse?
- _____
- _____
- _____
4. During Large Group we learned that we can have some selfish goals in a conflict:
- To win (but to win there must also be a loser and someone we may hurt in the process of winning).
 - To be right (but to be right, there must also be someone that is wrong and may have their opinion ignored or devalued).
 - To be understood/heard (by pursuing to be understood/heard, we can be more focused on what we need to say rather than trying to listen ourselves and own our part in the conflict).
- a) Which of these wrong goals (or perhaps a different one) do you pursue in conflict? What are healthy goals to replace these wrong goals?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- b) Ask each other: Is there anything that I do (action such as leaving/shutting down, a certain look, body language, raising my voice for example) that is hurtful to you in the midst of conflict?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- c) Think of a couple that you believe has good patterns of handling conflict in marriage. What specifically do you believe that they do well as far as handling conflict in a biblical and healthy way?
- _____
- _____
- _____

Apply What We Learned:

- Now that we have a better understanding of our conflict style(s) and our spouse’s conflict style(s), we can more easily see how we can hurt each other during conflict. It is important to agree on and establish some “Rules of Engagement” on how you will handle conflict together. Write down your own “Rules of Engagement”. A sample “Rules of Engagement” is included with this homework to help you get your own discussion going and give you some ideas for creating your own “Rules of Engagement”.
- Plan some time together to have a more focused opportunity to talk about how you handle conflict in your marriage. Preferable choose a time when there is not an open conflict in process so that the subject can be discussed calmly.
- If conflict arises this week, make a conscious effort to place the desires/needs of your spouse regarding the issue ahead of your own.

Recommended Additional Resources:

- The “5-3-2 Communication Tool” handout (included at the end of this week’s Homework)
- War of Words by Paul David Tripp
- Peacemaker by Ken Sande

Breakout Time – Please come prepared to talk about the following:

1. How have you followed through with the goals you set last month to improve the oneness in your marriage in regards to your communication with your spouse?

2. What has the Lord taught you during your personal times with Him this past week? How many days this past week were you in the Word and prayer? What are you reading?

3. In regards to your time discussing the four conflict styles with your spouse, how do you sin against and hurt your spouse as far as how you handle conflict? What is one way that you personally could move towards handling conflict with your spouse in a more healthy way this week? Ask the Lord to help you to recognize and change any habits that harm the unity and oneness in your marriage in regards to how you handle conflict.

4. How is the Lord leading you to pray this week for your marriage specifically in regards to how you handle conflict together?

Sample Rules of Engagement

Wife: I will not raise my voice when we are having a disagreement

Proverbs 15:1- A gentle answer turns away wrath.

I will not interrupt when my husband is talking

Proverbs 12:18 - There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

I will not quarrel or bicker

Proverbs 15:18 - A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute.
Proverbs 10:19 - When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

Husband: I will share what is on my heart with a balance of grace and truth even if it is uncomfortable

Eccl. 3:7: A time to tear and a time to sew; a time to keep silence and a time to speak.

I will listen without thinking about what I want to say next

Proverbs 18:13: Anyone who answers without listening is foolish and confused.

Before speaking I will try to see what I have done to hurt my wife and contribute to the conflict

Proverbs 12:15: The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to counsel.
2 Corinthians 13:5a: Look closely at yourselves. Test yourselves to see if you are living in the faith.

I will choose my words wisely

Proverbs 15:28: The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

Together: We will remember that we are on the same team and keep other's best interest at heart

1 Peter 4:8 - Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

We will not name call or use inflammatory words

Proverbs 12:18: The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

If my emotions feel out of control I will take time out to go and pray about it

Psalms 57:1: Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.

We will not assign motives to each other's actions

2 Corinthians 10:5: We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

We will not bring up resolved, forgiven issues from the past

Matthew 6:14-15: "For if you forgive other people their failures, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you will not forgive other people, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your failures."

We will seek balance between listening and talking

James 1:19: My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

We will NEVER mention divorce

Malachi 2:16: The Lord God All-Powerful of Israel hates anyone who is cruel enough to divorce his wife. So take care never to be unfaithful!

Communicating 5-3-2 (Listening Tool)

What is a 5-3-2?

The 5-3-2 listening tool helps to unclog communication and teach the art of truly listening to one another. Misunderstandings can be avoided or corrected and in marriage we can each feel that we are heard and appreciated. It comes in different sizes to fit different situations/needs. For example, another couple might use 3-2-1 to accomplish the same goal because they prefer a shorter version. With practice, you can discern which size best suits you each time you want to communicate effectively. Using 5-3-2 will help you communicate better by carefully listening to one another, summarizing what was just said, and both being sure what was said is what was actually heard.

How does one use a 5-3-2

Either spouse may request a 5-3-2 and both should agree to honor each other's requests. Give your spouse equal opportunity! Both can become better listeners and both can learn to streamline the issues to fit allotted times. Both must learn to play by the ground rules if communication is to be enhanced.

When one of you discerns communication is clogged and you wish to unclog it, request five minutes to speak about what is troubling you. During this five-minute monologue, your spouse cannot interrupt you, but must listen carefully to your concerns, issues, or joys. This may also be a positive expression of appreciation.

At the end of the five-minute monologue, your spouse should summarize in three minutes what you have just said. They can use their own words to express what you communicated to them. If necessary, they can even take brief notes to learn to focus!

Then, you have two minutes to clarify any misunderstanding of what you said in your first 5 minutes. This is not a time to add new information. It is only for clarification of what has already been said and can only last two minutes, not another long monologue.

Ground rules include staying calm and controlled, focusing on what is being said rather than on a rebuttal, and communicating by the 5 Rules of Healthy Biblical Communication. This is a communication tool to help resolve issues, not a time for argument or debate. After a time to meditate on all that was just said, a response may become the next 5-3-2! But the same ground rules apply. The goal is that each party is heard and understood. Agreement is not the goal, understanding is. We show respect to one another by hearing and understanding each other.

When does it happen?

It only takes ten minutes, so in most situations it should happen immediately, on the spot. If the timing or the location is inappropriate, try to relocate for just the few moments it takes to gain privacy and discuss the issue calmly. If it is impossible to talk immediately, schedule a 5-3-2 at the earliest convenience and be sure to keep the appointment. With practice and skill, this will become a way of communicating that can happen anywhere and at any time. Proverbs speaks much about careful listening. James 1:19 directs us to be swift to hear and slow to speak. Learn to listen carefully!