

Marriage Enrichment



Lesson Topic: Healthy Conflict

Week Two Homework

The homework and Small Group discussion time for this week will help give some practical guidance on how to establish biblical, healthy ways to handle and resolve conflict with your spouse. As you learn how to handle conflict better as a couple, your conflict will generally be less severe and less frequent.

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):

A. Read James 1:19

How would being quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger help to reduce conflict in your marriage?

B. Read Ephesians 4:26-27

What does it mean "to be angry and do not sin...and give no opportunity to the devil?"
In practicality, how can you "not let the sun go down on your anger?"

C. Read Philippians 2:3-4

Why is humility and doing "nothing from selfish ambition" so important in healthy conflict resolution? What can you do to practically put the interests and needs of your spouse ahead of your own when conflict arises?

D. Proverbs 12:18

What do you think that a wise person does to have his tongue bring healing – especially in regards to conflict?

E. Ephesians 4:1-3 and Ephesians 4:29-32 (ESV)

In addition to humility, notice all the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in verses 1-3: gentleness, patience, love, unity, peace. Verses 29-32 lists exhorts us to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving. Which of these is the hardest fruit for you to display in a conflict situation? How can you work on that so as to grow in that fruit?

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 through potentially emotional topics – such as how you handle conflict together.

1. You learned in Large Group that to resolve conflict you need to submit to God:
 - a) Humbly (What is your part in this? Your focus needs to be more on what you have done to hurt your spouse and deal with any sin against the Lord first and your spouse second. Ask for forgiveness when necessary.)
 - b) Actively (Go and seek what is on God’s heart. Be proactive to put the needs & interests of your spouse ahead of your own, take the issue to the Lord in prayer)
 - c) Diligently (conflict resolution is hard work – you must make the effort even when you are tired or feeling selfish or even hurt)
 - d) Immediately (don’t give the devil a foothold by letting the situation fester in your mind, be quick to help heal any wounds that you have caused, be quick to ask for forgiveness and to forgive)
 - e) Continually (don’t keep score, don’t bring up the past, never give up, forgive “70 times 7 times”)

Using the list and explanations above, what are some things that your spouse says and/or does that are especially helpful leading up to or during conflict that help diffuse and resolve the conflict in a successful, God-honoring way? Share your responses with each other to encourage your spouse in his/her efforts to resolve conflict with you well.

2. An unmet expectation in marriage is conflict waiting to happen. It is essential for you as married couples to be able to work out conflict successfully in regards to your unmet, unspoken or unknown expectations in order to come together in oneness.

Go through the list of topics below and evaluate each one on a scale of 1 to 5; “1” being “very easy to come together” and “5” being “very hard to come together”. Go through the list individually first and then come together to share your “scores” with your spouse. Circle the topics for which you had very different scores, and a few of the “hard” topics from the list (with a rating of 4 or 5) which are most likely to cause conflict and schedule a time to discuss them openly and honestly with each other - and **with a lot of grace, understanding and patience** using the verses that you discussed above as your model ☺.

- a) How to divide up household chores – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- b) How "clean" you desire your home to be (or not!) – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- c) Work schedules – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- d) What you watch and how much time on TV/internet/Facebook – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- e) How much time on video games and when – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- f) Sexual intimacy – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- g) Time spent with each other – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- h) Time spent with friends & others – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- i) The role of your in-laws (how involved, how often to visit, etc.) – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- j) Outside interests (both as a couple and separately) – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- k) Spiritual growth and intimacy individually & together – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- l) Financial expectations / budget – [Rating of 1-5: _____] – [Easy or Hard]
- m) Material possessions – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- n) Children/parenting – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- o) Vacations – [Rating of 1-5: _____]
- p) Future plans/dreams – [Rating of 1-5: _____]

3. Invest some extra time to discussing the following with your spouse: Romans 15:5 (ESV) states: “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus.”

a) What does living in harmony look like in marriage?

b) Are there any repetitive areas of disharmony in your marriage (items/issues about which you frequently disagree – perhaps some of which were identified in the list above for Question 2)? These are the little foxes (from the Song of Solomon) that can creep into a marriage and destroy it. Perhaps it would be wise to get some counseling about that issue from your Mentor Couple or someone else that you trust for wise biblical advice.

Apply What You Learned:

- As a follow up to Question 2 above: Invest some time together to have a more focused opportunity to talk about some of the expectations that you had coming into marriage. Also talk about any topics from the list from Question 2 that are harder for you and your spouse to come together in oneness. Preferably choose a time when there is not an open conflict in process so that the subject can be discussed calmly with an “agenda”.
- If you have not already done so, agree on and establish some “Rules of Engagement” on how you will handle conflict together. Write down your own “Rules of Engagement” and come prepared to share them at Small Group this week. A sample “Rules of Engagement” was included in the homework from Week One to help you get your own discussion going and give you some ideas for creating your own “Rules of Engagement”.
- 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 “Ground Rules for Healthy Conflict” (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 conflict resolution 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. How do you sin against your spouse during conflict? What do you need to root out as a sinful attitude or behavior to become more Christ-like toward your spouse – especially during conflict? Is there anything that you need to seek forgiveness for from your spouse and the Lord and repent from in regards to any conflict with your spouse?

4. How is the Lord leading you to pray this week for you and your marriage specifically in the area of healthy conflict resolution – especially in regards to any sinful attitude or behavior against your spouse?

Ground Rules for Healthy Conflict

I. Rekindle Your Love For Each Other.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 and 13:13 The greatest virtue in your relationship is love (1-3, 13). Love is revealed in practical ways (4-8).

II. Set Some Ground Rules for when you are having conflict.

1. **We will recommit ourselves to making our marriage work.**
Divorce isn't an option. We're going to see this incident through, and build a better marriage because of it.
2. **We will attack the problem, not the person.**
We will agree to disagree agreeably. Do the facts of this incident warrant the heated emotions we're showing? How about reassuring each other, "Honey, I'm not sure I agree with you in this area, but I want you to know that I love you. Let's work this out as a team."
3. **We will always put people before things.**
No broken dish, dented fender, damaged clothing, or scratched [cd] is just cause for lashing out at the other person.
4. **We will seek to give the benefit of the doubt to the other person.**
Choose to believe the best in each other. Believe that they have your best interests at heart. Unless the other person admits otherwise, he meant well. He was trying as hard as he could to do the right thing.
5. **We will try to see the situation from the other person's point of view.**
How would I feel if I were in their shoes?
6. **Never in public. If it happens in front of the kids, be sure to model healthy conflict resolution for them to help give them the tools for when they are older.**
7. **We will try to use "I" statements instead of "you" statements.**
We will make and discuss observations, not accusations.

"You" (Accusation) "You are insensitive" or "You never pay attention to me" or "...and then you started yelling..."

"I" (Observation)
"I feel misunderstood."
"I don't think we're communicating."
"I feel left out."
"It bothers me when we yell at each other."
8. **We will watch our tone of voice.**
Loudness and bitterness only indicate that we're losing control of ourselves.
9. **When an assertion is made about me, I'll try to repeat it verbatim before responding.**
Besides helping to calm us both, this will verify that a) I've heard you correctly, and b) you said what you meant (and meant what you said).
10. **We will not be overly defensive, but open to the possibility we might be wrong.**
11. **We will avoid these statements: "You ALWAYS..." and "You NEVER..."**
If these accusations are true then they should have been brought up when they first occurred.
12. **We will not dredge up the past sins of the other.**

13. No stomping out of the room.

This only prolongs the altercation and puts the problem on the slow-cooker. Instead, let's stop for a breather by saying: "Honey, I need a few moments to calm down. I'm afraid I'll say something I don't really mean."

14. We will talk it out to its conclusion.

How can we resolve this? What have we learned from this? How was I wrong? What can we do to prevent this from happening again?"

15. We will keep our anger under control.

III. Things to Think About

1. Do I need to confront the issue?

Can I live with it? Is it sin? 80/10/10 rule:

- letting it go 80% of the time,
- taking it to the Lord and leaving it with Him 10% of the time
- bring it up for discussion 10% of the time

2. Examine my own failures. What is my contribution to the conflict?

3. When an overly strong response come my way, try to get to the bottom of the hurt to see if there is a misunderstanding. Try to understand the hurt behind the reaction.

4. Always be able to lay down in bed with your spouse and know that everything will be worked out if it is not already. Reassure each other of this!

5. "WAIT" – "Why Am I Talking"

What is my reason for wanting to say this? What is my motive? Is it loving my spouse?

6. No powering up as men to intimidate to get your own way. Women cannot use tears to manipulate.

IV. Always Forgive.

"...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." (Colossians 3:13)