

## GROWING THROUGH CONFLICT

### I. Truths to Remember in Conflict

- A. **The Gospel.** The Gospel gives us hope in the midst of a conflict. Christ died on the cross to resolve our greatest conflict and to break the power of sin. (Romans 8:32-39)
- B. **God's Sovereignty.** God sovereignly allows conflicts to take place to make us more like Christ. (Romans 8:28-29)
- C. **God's Grace.** God's grace is available to help us to respond in a way that glorifies Him. (1 Corinthians 10:13; Galatians 5:16)
- D. Your spouse is not your opponent. Think together as you work through a conflict.

### II. Biblical Perspective on Conflict

- A. 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)
- B. Conflict reveals a sinful craving in my heart. (James 4:1-4)
  - "One of the joys 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 affec-

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tion, 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)

C. 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.”

### III. Humility is Required to Resolve Conflict

#### A. Humble yourself before God.

- 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)

- 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)

- 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)

*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?

*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.

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

- Begin by eagerly extending forgiveness.
- 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)

- Get others involved.

**IV. 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.

**V. How Do We Grow In Resolving Conflict?**

- A. Study.
  - “Peacemaking for Families” (especially Chapters 4-7) by Ken Sande
  - “Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands” (especially Chapters 4-5) by Paul Tripp.
  - “Cross and Criticism” by Alfred Poirier
- B. Be diligent in putting sin to death in your own life.

- C. Practice biblical fellowship with your spouse and others. Invite your spouse's input.

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

- A. Lead in being an example for your wife of being teachable and humble.
- B. Lead in an understanding way. It takes effort to do this. If your wife is bringing her observation in anger, graciously help her. (1 Peter 3:7, Psalm 103)
- C. Lead in sacrificial love for your wife.
- D. Lead in getting others involved in your marriage.

## **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)**

## Session 3

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## Discussion Questions

1. Turn to Section I of your outline. Which one of the “Truths to Remember in Conflict” do you most often forget? How will remembering that truth help you in conflict?
2. How does the gospel give you hope to resolve conflicts?
3. In seeking to resolve conflict, in what specific ways do you need to humble yourself before God? Before your spouse?
4. How have you involved others in helping you to resolve a conflict? Would this be a strength or a weakness? Why?
5. Men, ask your wife to give you her evaluation of your leadership in the area of resolving conflict.
  - Do I lead by example in the area of humility in conflict? How can I improve?
  - Evaluate how I am leading in the area of biblical fellowship with you and involving other couples in our life.
  - How can I grow in leading us to resolve conflicts?