

Outline for Conflict Resolution and Managing Anger Class

1. Introduction

- a. Who has had conflict?
 - i. Anyone who hasn't? Are you alive? Is your significant other?
- b. Every couple has conflict; we're two different people, with different personalities, different families, different life experiences, etc.
- c. "The best predictor of marital success is the way you handle conflicts and disagreements." -Fighting for Your Marriage
 - i. How we handle contact is critical! Conflict is a catalyst that can either divide or strengthen our relationship.
 - ii. Our goal today is to give you tools to help you "fight well": keep crucial conversations in your relationship from becoming conflicts, and have stronger relationships as a results
 - iii. We will talk about what Scripture says about anger and conflict, give you tools to keep difficult conversations from turning into conflict, give you strategy for fighting with each other rather than against each other, and talk about forgiveness

2. Setting the stage: Scripture

- a. "...here is one thing that would complete my joy—come together as one in mind and spirit and purpose, sharing in the same love. Don't let selfishness and prideful agendas take over. Embrace true humility, and lift your heads to extend love to others. Get beyond yourselves and protecting your own interests; be sincere, and secure your neighbors' interests first." - Philippians 2:2-4
 - i. This is Paul's letter to the Philippians. It's not addressing married couples directly, but the principles ring true!
 1. "...one in mind and spirit and purpose..." : What is your shared purpose as a married couple? Something to think about!
 2. "Don't let selfishness and prideful agendas take over..."
Selfishness is our default as human beings; no one has to teach a child to be selfish! Marriage and parenting shows us where those selfish spots are!
 3. "Get beyond yourselves and protecting your own interests; be sincere, and secure your neighbors' interests first.": This is empathy Paul is describing here; as a married couple, we're committing to moving beyond ourselves. "I" becomes "we", "mine" becomes "ours", "me" becomes "us".
- b. "A fool does not think before he unleashes his temper, but a wise man holds back and remains quiet." Prov 29:11 (VOICE)
 - i. Your presence in this class tells us you are pursuing wisdom and understanding - you want to learn! We are here today to give you tools and strategies for how to resolve your conflict in a God-honoring way. But remember that the most important thing you can do for your relationship is to personally develop your spiritual life and grow more like Christ.

- c. "So put away your lies and speak the truth to one another because we are all part of one another. When you are angry, don't let it carry you into sin. Don't let the sun set with anger in your heart or give the devil room to work." Eph 4:25-27 (VOICE)
 - i. It's important to notice here that anger itself is not a sin. Even Jesus, during his time here on earth, felt and expressed anger. The key is not letting that anger carry us into sin - getting carried away and letting it rule us and allowing ourselves to react in sinful ways. Healthy anger can be a catalyst of change. Sinful anger breaks down relationships, including our spiritual relationship with God, giving the devil a foothold in our lives.
- d. "The thief approaches with malicious intent, looking to steal, slaughter, and destroy; I came to give life with joy and abundance." John 10:10 (VOICE)
- e. "We're not waging war against enemies of flesh and blood alone. No, this fight is against tyrants, against authorities, against supernatural powers and demon princes that slither in the darkness of this world, and against wicked spiritual armies that lurk about in heavenly places." Eph. 6:12 (VOICE)
 - i. This thief, this enemy, here is the devil. As we go through this lesson, and as you work to apply it in your relationship in the days and weeks to come, remember that when you are encountering conflict and when you are feeling anger, there is a spiritual component to the challenges we face.
 - ii. "Rather than fighting against each other, you and your partner are on one side of the table and the problem is on the opposite side of the table." (The Tirabasis)
 - iii. So our goal is not to teach you how to get an edge and win arguments with your s/o! Rather, how to work together as a team against the devil and resolve the conflicts you encounter in a healthy way
- f. So much of conflict isn't about the issues themselves; it's about the context in which they occur and how we deal with them. We have a fun video for you..."Not So Newlyweds"... (4:11)

3. Not So Newlyweds - VIDEO

- a. You saw in the video, the scenarios were the same. It was all about how they reacted to each other. Did they choose to downplay differences, faults, and inconveniences for the sake of the relationship and their partner? (Newlyweds) Or did they assume the worst, choose selfishness, criticize, and needlessly escalate into conflict? (Not-so-newlyweds)
 - i. This is a stereotype, but it doesn't have to be you! Instead, as you grow together and eventually enter your "not-so-newlywed" years, our prayer for you is that you have grown and developed in your conflict resolution, so you have a kinder and healthier approach than ever before. And our goal here is to give you the tools to accomplish just that.
- b. Let's take a look at the ways couples typically approach conflict.

4. There are 5 common patterns of confronting conflict:

- a. Fight to win

- i. "I am right, you are wrong"
 - ii. Domination; relationship takes on less value compared to triumph
- b. **Withdraw**
 - i. "I am uncomfortable"
 - ii. Relationship takes on less value...avoiding the discomfort of conflict
- c. **Yield**
 - i. "Whatever you want is fine"
 - ii. Safe is better than confrontation
 - iii. Peace at any cost
- d. **Going to others**
 - i. You turn to friends, family, co-workers, etc. for advice or to vent
 - ii. Character assassination results
 - iii. Ask yourself: have you spent more time talking to God than to others about this?
- e. **Loving confrontation / healthy dialog**
 - i. You value the relationship more than winning or losing, escaping, or feeling uncomfortable
 - ii. You are willing to face discomfort for the sake of the health of the relationship and actual resolution of the conflict

5. **Discussion**

- a. Which pattern is most like you?
- b. Which patterns did you observe growing up? 2:27

6. **Crucial Conversations Intro**

Now that we have identified the ways couples typically approach conflict; we want to spend some time talking about how we can have healthy dialog rather than falling into unhealthy patterns of conflict.

- i. How can we have healthy dialog about serious topics where we disagree, even deeply, without devolving into blood pumping, raised-voice, door-slamming conflict?
 - 1. "How can I have a candid conversation with my husband about being more dependable and avoid creating bad feelings or wasting our time?"
 - 2. These are skills that are sorely needed, and not just in marriage relationships.
 - 3. We've already touched on some of this when talking about communication. We want to laser focus on how to have productive conversations about difficult topics.
- ii. Before conflict begins, there is a stage where conversations go "crucial". If we can recognize a crucial conversation and use tools to handle it appropriately, we can have meaningful and productive conversation about difficult issues.

7. **Hallmarks of a Crucial Conversation**

- a. **Opinions Differ**

- i. Straightforward...you and your spouse aren't the same person. Opinions *will* differ.
 - b. Emotions are Strong
 - i. Stomach or chest tightens, mouth gets dry, lump in throat
 - ii. Feel scared, hurt, angry, or feel like we're suppressing emotion
 - iii. Voices raised, fingers pointing, become withdrawn
 - c. The Stakes are High
 - i. Even the most seemingly insignificant sources of conflict, in the context of our most critical relationships, can be high stakes. [The lack of blood in the thinking part of your brain makes you feel, in the moment, that the stakes are much higher than they actually are.]
 - d. Sometimes we have time to prepare. We know a crucial conversation is coming...maybe we rehearse in our head beforehand. Other times, crucial conversations creep up on us! Something small went crucial!
8. Staying In Dialog
- a. Once you have identified that you are having a crucial conversation, pay attention! Be fully engaged and working together to come to a resolution. The goal here is to work together *with* our spouse to come up with a solution. We're together, on one side of the table, and the problem is on the other side. It is so important to both have this perspective.
 - b. The goal for a crucial conversation is to stay in a state of healthy dialog: information can freely flow
 - i. We're adding to a pool of shared meaning; we have ideas, thoughts, and feelings that the other person doesn't know; our goal is to share them and get everything out on the table
 - ii. When we can maintain a state of healthy dialog in a crucial conversation, we can have conversations about even the most difficult of topics
 - 1. Think of a time you've received difficult feedback...maybe from a parent, your boss, your significant other. Was it easier to receive if you knew they truly had your best interest at heart?
 - 2. When we can trust the motives and ability of the other person, we can freely share and freely receive
 - iii. When emotions run strong, when opinions differ, and when the stakes are high, it's easy to move from actively dealing with the issue at hand to just wanting to win the argument or worse—wanting to actively harm the other person
 - 1. How can we avoid this?
 - a. "The best way to work on us is to start with me."
 - c. Ask yourself key questions:
 - i. What do I want for myself?
 - ii. What do I want for others?
 - iii. What do I want for the relationship?
 - iv. How would I behave if I want these results?

- d. Safe conditions in a conversation are those in which everyone can freely exchange information and add to the pool of meaning
 - i. The content of a conversation is less critical than the conditions
 - 1. When you lose trust in others' motives and no longer think they have your best interest at heart, things escalate
 - 2. You basically go blind: the blood leaves your head (just when you need it!), targets your large muscle groups...flight or fight response
 - ii. When someone withdraws (becomes quiet, "whatever you want", sarcasm—a form of withdrawal) or attacks (makes potshots, personal attacks), this is an indication that they are no longer feeling safe in the conversation
 - 1. How can we restore dialog and safety without responding in kind
 - 2. We need to recognize our own style for dealing with stressful conversations. Do we withdraw? Attack?
- e. **Restoring safety**
 - i. Express that you're working towards a common goal, a mutual purpose. We're both on the same side of the table, facing the problem on the other.
 - ii. Empathy: learn from the other person's point of view.
 - iii. Maintain and demonstrate respect; when the only thing we're doing in the conversation is trying to retain dignity.
 - 1. Look for nonverbal cues indicating respect is being lost. Eye rolls, sighs, etc.
 - 2. How do you respect people you don't respect? Maybe even sometimes you feel you don't respect your spouse for some reason? "Lord, help me to forgive those who sin differently than I". We all have weaknesses.

9. Breaking the cycle of escalation

a. Apologize when appropriate

- i. Sincerely, with the motive to change (who can't spot an insincere apology)?
- ii. Requires sacrificing our ego, but we can gain the results we really want

b. Use contrasting statements

- i. Address others' concerns by clarifying your respect and purpose
- ii. "I don't want to suggest that the problem is yours. It's ours. I do want to be able to have a conversation about it so that we can understand one another better and come up with a solution."
- iii. "I don't want you to think that I don't appreciate the time you've spent working on our new budget. You've done great! I just want to make sure I'm in the loop and we're setting goals together for things we both want."

c. Define purpose, brainstorm solutions

- i. Commit to pursuing a goal that benefits everyone, invent that common goal and brainstorm new strategies

10. Crucial Conversation Discussion

- a. Think about a recent crucial conversation you had (with your significant other, at work, etc). Can you identify the point where it became crucial?
- b. How did the conversation resolve? Was healthy dialog maintained?
- c. Can you think of anyone you know who is skilled at having crucial conversations? What behaviors or techniques do you see then use in a crucial conversation?

11. Pulling back from the brink - when you missed the beginning of your crucial conversation and the dialog is no longer healthy

- a. **Use a statement to diffuse anger:** something you agree on as a good phrase/reminder that you are a team and this will be resolved
 - i. "I love you and you love me and we don't want to hurt each other"
 - ii. "I feel like we are under spiritual attack"
 - iii. "We're a team, what's the problem we're facing?"
 - iv. "Can we take a 10-minute time-out"
- b. **Taking a timeout:**
 - i. Calm yourself and get alone, process
 - ii. Identify the enemy and your emotions
 - iii. Time outs are not a time to reload your verbal ammunition and develop the perfect one-liner
 - iv. Not an avoidance tactic
 - v. Don't chase someone down during their processing time
 - vi. Decide on a time to come back together and talk
 - vii. Do what is needed to get in a good frame of mind
- c. **Use a systematic approach** to conflict resolution
 - i. Call on God immediately
 - 1. "Lord we love You and each other. Help us to resolve this conflict and not hurt each other. We realize that we are in a spiritual battle, so please give us Your wisdom, and understanding at this time. We're hurting; we need Your direction. Please come near to us now." Amen
 - ii. Check the time ("HALT" - are you hungry, angry, lonely, or tired?)
 - iii. If the time is ok and you are ready to talk, Proceed with the "intentional/empathetic listening" formula as discussed last week, or follow the guidance for a crucial conversation that we just went over
 - iv. Formulate a statement that clearly identifies the conflict for both partners
 - 1. *"It seems to me that the issue here is..." "yes, that is the issue"*
 - v. Brainstorm possible solutions
 - vi. Agree upon a solution
 - vii. Try your solution and evaluate its effectiveness. It's a test...if it doesn't work, try something else!
 - 1. Examples of try your solution and evaluate its effectiveness - deciding to sit down and budget, then evaluate if we actually do sit down and do it

12. Overall things to remember:

- a. **“Those with knowledge know when to be quiet, and those with understanding know how to remain calm.” Prov 17:27 (VOICE)**
 - i. Check your heart before you talk
 - b. **Be sure** to always start with an affirmation—it starts things off right
 - c. Different personality types may have different preferences for how to strategically approach a crucial conversation gone wrong (take time to process, discuss immediately...)
 - d. Use “I feel” statements (instead of absolute statements... “I feel overwhelmed” vs. “You never do the dishes...”
 - e. Perspective! Learn emotional and situational triage
 - i. Before any confrontation, ask: how important is this? An hour, week, year from now, and in light of eternity? 5:18
13. **Example** Conflict
- a. So...what does it look like to put some of these things into practice? We’ve cooked up an example for you...
 - b. Setting the scene...it’s December 2nd, of some year. A light snow is falling, the lights are hung, and holiday travel plans are being made. But, as Ben and Jill will soon discover, the conversation quickly turns crucial...
 - c. Conflict script...
14. **Why is it so hard to forgive?**
- a. Easy to harbor bitterness if s/o is playing the victim card (family of origin)
 - b. Exhibit the fruit of the spirit of self-control
 - c. If we are having the same argument over & over again, consider why...is one of us neglecting to change or be considerate? Could be because:
 - i. One of us is hurting too much
 - ii. We think forgiveness will excuse the behavior
 - iii. We believe have a right to judge or punish
 - iv. We think forgiving makes us vulnerable
 - v. Withholding forgiveness gives us a false sense of power or control
 - vi. We wrongly equate forgiving with forgetting
 - vii. We assign different values to things - something may be way more important to one of us
 - viii. We may desire to “get even”
 - ix. May not have good examples of how to forgive
 - x. We believe our spouse should ask or earn forgiveness
 - d. **What** forgiveness is NOT:
 - i. **Enabling**
 - ii. **Excusing sin**
 - iii. **Tolerating abuse**
 - iv. **Peace at any costs**
 - v. **Holding a grudge**
 - e. Learn to give what is not deserved
 - i. Petty vs. significant checkpoint: how important is this week/year/eternity
 - f. **Benefits** of forgiveness: Mayo Clinic

- i. Healthier relationships
 - ii. Improved mental health
 - iii. Less anxiety, stress and hostility
 - iv. Lower blood pressure
 - v. Fewer symptoms of depression
 - vi. A stronger immune system
 - vii. Improved heart health
 - viii. Improved self-esteem
- g. "Put up with one another. Forgive. Pardon any offenses against one another, as the Lord has pardoned you, because you should act in kind."
Col 3:13 (VOICE)
- h. "A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers" - Ruth Graham
- 15. **Now, not all** conflict is just a matter of perspective. It is important to learn to recognize the **difference between normal and deep conflict**:
 - a. Normal (everything in the newlyweds video):
 - i. Daily home and car management
 - ii. Minor financial conflict
 - iii. Lack of verbal control
 - iv. Small parenting conflicts
 - v. Poor communication
 - vi. Time management
 - b. Deep:
 - i. Deep contempt for the other side of the family/stepchild
 - ii. Verbal abuse, uncontrolled swearing, unwillingness to engage
 - iii. Physical abuse, hitting people or throwing things
 - iv. Major financial conflict (withholding funds to manipulate behavior, hiding secret accounts, ruinous spending)
 - v. Addiction issues (drugs, alcohol, gambling, pornography, sex)
 - vi. Isolating spouse or kids from family, friends, or church
 - vii. Control or manipulations or lack of respect
 - viii. Unfaithfulness
 - ix. Untruthfulness, lack of transparency (secrets)
 - c. **Note**: this class is not geared toward couples in the "deep conflict" category, please contact a leader couple for information on professional help
 - d. Also note: "normal" conflict does not necessarily mean minor. It is normal to have conflict over serious, heartfelt things that are very sensitive and need to be addressed with care. However, if the conflict is a result of one partner behaving in an abusive way, that is when it should be classed "deep" and you should seek professional counseling 4:53
- 16. **Discussion: Areas of Conflict**
 - a. Individually, look at the common areas of conflict on page 51 in your book. Pick 2 that you think are most common in your relationship.
 - b. Compare choices. Did you agree? How can you have a productive dialog about this?

- c. Share with your discussion group if you are comfortable doing so (what areas did you identify, and how will you have healthy dialog?)

17. Conclusion

- a. We've thrown a lot at you in this class.
 - i. Don't worry about implementing everything, or feel like you're a failure if you don't get it exactly right. That's part of being human.
 - 1. We often think we have to choose between telling the truth and keeping the relationship, but we don't. We need to become skilled in having conversations where we can get all information, even the difficult information, out in the open.
 - ii. Start with small improvements; start putting some of the techniques we've talked about into practice, even if it's only a few of them.
 - iii. **The only** way to get better is to practice.
 - iv. There is no "right size" for conflict in a healthy relationship. If there are things you can think of that seem too small to mention, or too big to approach, they will eventually cause issues. Get it out in the open, have the difficult conversation now.

18. Homework Assignments

- a. Personal Reflection Homework
- b. Couples Assignment: Family of Origin
- c. Couples Assignment: Areas of Conflict
- d. Extra Credit: Read Crucial Conversations

19. Close with prayer

25:50 minutes of straight content, plus two breakout sessions and newlywed video