

Make Conflict Your Friend!

James 1:2-4

Intro. – Two women who were the best of friends were sitting and visiting. “Mary,” asked her friend, “what in the world is the matter with you?” “Oh, I’m having trouble with my husband,” Mary explained. “What happened?” “Well, he told me he wasn’t going to speak to me for thirty days.” “But,” her friend interrupted, “that ought to thrill you.” “It did,” Mary answered, “but today is the last day.”

No marriage is immune/free from conflict. Our text instructs us to count it all joy when trials (another word for conflict) enter our lives. Am I suggesting that we need to rejoice when disagreement enters our marriages? How can trials be considered good let alone an important aspect of growing together in wedded bliss?

The beginning of the manned space program, several problems arose. One was the matter of weightlessness. It was learned in a weightless situation the muscles of the body lose their strength and become flabby/useless. Our muscles retain their tone/strength on earth because they constantly have to struggle against the force of gravity. Similarly, a marriage without some conflict will become flabby. Trials or conflict in marriage are necessary in order to grow and strengthen one another.

Purpose: to see how conflict in marriage is necessary for wedded bliss

Some may question this principle. That is because of a couple of marital myths. We’ll begin by “busting” these myths and then look at the Does and Don’ts of making conflict your friend in marriage.

I Breaking Two Big MYTHS

- show on Discovery Channel entitled “Mythbusters”... what we’re going to do today...

A. Myth #1 – Good Marriages Have No Problems

1. Do you ever argue with your husband/wife? Ever have conflict with your mate? If so, congratulations, you have a “normal” marriage.
2. The idea that “good marriages” are free from conflict, disagreements or problems is utterly false – no matter how spiritually mature you might be, or how well matched you think you are, conflict in marriage is inevitable – it is a normal part of marriage.
3. Real issue is how do you handle your battles, misunderstandings, pressures and disappointments?

B. Myth #2 – Conflict is Bad for Good Marriages

1. Conflict doesn’t have to hurt a good marriage – in fact, it’s important part of every good marriage.
2. Handled correctly, tension will lead to a greater understanding/intimacy... handled poorly, conflict will lead to breakdown and isolation.
3. All marriages, the good and the bad, have problems. The difficulties in each type of marriage closely resemble each other. The difference lies in how the conflict is handled.
4. There is *good* and *bad* conflict = constructive and destructive... How can we train ourselves to use conflict that inevitably comes into marriage for constructive rather than destructive ends?

A good marriage handles conflict with joy knowing that conflict produces endurance = lacking in nothing!

II How to Make Conflict DESTRUCTIVE

A. Ignore Good Anger

1. If you never get angry, there is a serious deficiency in your development as a person. Issues ought to matter; opinions and conclusions are significant... Especially true in marriage...
2. Ephesians 4:26 “*Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.*”
 - a. while we shouldn’t hide our anger, there is an appropriate way to express anger that has nothing to do with pushing, shoving, slapping or hitting, threatening etc.
 - b. anger is a good/holy thing when it is handled properly – where many of us miss the boat, we get mad and attack the person (our mate) rather than the problem.

3. Arguments where a husband/wife honestly express their anger is therapeutic. *When* disagreements come, you need to let your mate know you still love them but it's time to resolve issues rather than dance around as though there is nothing up... Don't ignore good anger!!

B. Use Scud Missiles

1. Remember the 1991 Persian Gulf War we were introduced to bombs that would do a minimal amount of damage while hitting their target. They were called *smart bombs*?... Scud missiles?...
2. Sometimes in arguments with mates, you call in the heavy guns; so, instead of using a *smart bomb* you often use the errant, unpredictable *scud missile*...
 - a. get in argument and the phrase "So what do you want, a divorce?" gets used...
 - b. your mate barely says two words, storms out door – Husbands think this manly way to deal with matters – Not so! Cowardly thing to do. Need to stay in the ring, deal with matters head on... Anybody can run – cowards do it all the time... Marriage not for fainthearted...
3. Also been described as the "turtle approach" = conflict arises retreat into shell and remain silent... Problem with such little problems can grow into mountainous problems
4. Proverbs 15:1 "*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*" Words do matter – be wise when in a conflict with your mate!

C. Air Your Dirty Laundry in Public

1. Illus. – A bride/groom in Westport, CT got into a fight over the tradition of cramming wedding cake into each other's face. Tracey/John O'Donnell were arrested at their wedding reception for disturbing the peace. Tracey O'Donnell said her husband fed her the cake too roughly, after she told him to take it easy, police reported. Fighting ensued when she responded in kind, police said."
2. This is an extreme illustration, but it illustrates the danger in airing your dirty laundry in public.
3. Don't make your private affairs something you air in front of family, friends or neighbors – such will hurt your mate and do nothing to solve the conflict.

D. Use Intimacy as a Weapon

1. Intimacy in marriage is designed by God for two key reasons – procreation... enhance cleaving...
2. To use it as a tool of reward or weapon of manipulation is counterproductive simply because it is contrary to God's will for your marriage.
3. Don't let the world's preoccupation with sex ruin what God intended to be binding in marriage!

More could be addressed, but be aware of how easy it is to make conflict destructive element in marriage!!

III How to Make Conflict CONSTRUCTIVE

A. Heed the Word of God

1. We need to verbalize to God our conflict with our mate and seek then His response.
2. Illus. – preacher who said in moment of conflict he'd pray: "Lord, change my kids... change my wife..." When he finished his plea, the answer would always come back, "I intend to, but let's start with your kid's dad and your wife's husband."
3. Not suggesting we pray expecting audible response from God. We pray knowing His answer is found in His Word. – Conflict with mate is resolved in our accepting our roles...

B. Understand Your Mate

1. What frightens/agitates them... what makes them insecure/wondering of their standing with you?
2. First married, Mary would ask, "Do you still love me?" Finally have learned to reassure of this verbally...
 - a. Proverbs 25:11 "*Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.*"
 - b. Proverbs 15:23 "*...how delightful is a timely word!*"
3. Knowing what to say and when to say to your mate means you need to understand your mate!

C. Understand Yourself

1. Most of us are either too easy or too hard on ourselves. Only by knowing the Lord can you come to truly understand one's self.
 - Proverbs 20:5 "*A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out.*"

2. Key to having constructive conflict in marriage is understanding one's self – no one understands you like He Who made you...

D. Talk With Your Mate

1. No relationship can work unless regular and healthy communication takes place – true in our relationship with God... true in our relationship with our mate...
2. Most husbands and wives during conflicts use harsh words – retaliate—insult for insult – e.g.:
 - wife asked, “Why do you wear your wedding ring on the wrong finger?” “Reminds me I married the wrong woman.”
 - wife said, “We have a good marriage because both of us love the same man – you!”
 - wife, “You love football more than me.” “Maybe so, but I love you better than baseball.”
3. Psalm 141:3 “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.”
 - a. communicate wisely with our mates – choose your words wisely making sure you say what you mean and mean what you say.
 - b. confession and forgiveness allow conflict to open doors to a stronger relationship...

Conclusion: Say it again, conflict comes into every marriage, but it's up to us to make sure conflict is constructive and not destructive. Constructive conflict leads to endurance and a deepening of our relationship to both our spouse and to God. That's why our texts makes most clear – count it all joy when you have conflict!

Ed Young (author and preacher) explained it this way: “Conflict can destroy your marriage. But it also can bring fresh breezes and new life into the relationship... Sometimes marriage is like a duel. When we learn to successfully handle conflict, guess what? It becomes a duet and the harmony from it is almost divine...” You will decide whether your marriage is going to be a duel or a duet.