

Preparing for Marriage, Part 2

Conflict and Communication

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1 Conflict

FORT WORTH, Texas — A marriage counselor was convicted Friday of fatally shooting his ex-fiancé. Lester Winningham, a licensed psychologist, is accused of shooting Deborah Houchin three times in her Arlington home before dumping her body behind a mechanic's shop in 2005. During three days of testimony, the jury was told how **the couple fought often in the months before her death**. Winningham testified in his own defense Thursday, saying he is innocent. Houchin, 56, owned a marriage counseling clinic and had been engaged to Winningham briefly after meeting him through an online dating service. She helped Winningham set up his practice in Arlington after he received his doctoral degree. He also moved in with her. (AP, 10/12/07)

1.1 *Consequences of Conflict*

1.1.1 Separation

- A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer **separates** intimate friends. (Proverbs 16:28)
- He who conceals a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter **separates** intimate friends. (Proverbs 17:9)

1.1.2 Constructs Barriers to Relationship

- A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the **bars of a citadel**. (Proverbs 18:19)

1.1.3 Hard Life

- Good understanding produces favor, but the way of the treacherous is **hard**. (Proverbs 13:15)
- It is better to **live in a desert land** than with a contentious and vexing woman. (Proverbs 21:19)
- Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is **not another to lift him up**. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

1.1.4 Fear

- Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27:34-35, 41; 32:6-7)

1.1.5 Depression

- Cain (Genesis 4:5-6)

1.1.6 Anger Escalates to Murder

- Cain and Able (Genesis 4:2-8)

1.2 Source of Conflict (Idolatry)

1.2.1 Selfish Desire

_____ ¹ is the root of all evil. (James 3:16)

_____ ² is the source of conflict. (James 4:1-3)

Desire is not wrong in and of itself. In fact, God _____ ³ (Psalm 145:16) and _____ ⁴ (Psalm 145:19) the desires of those of fear Him.

However, the desire for something is sinful if I'm willing to sin _____ ⁵ get it, or I'm willing to sin _____ ⁶ I don't get it.

1.2.2 From the Heart

The things that proceed out of the mouth come from the _____ ⁷. (Matthew 15:17-20)

_____ ⁸ begins in the heart. (Psalm 95:10)

The heart is _____ ⁹. (Jeremiah 17:9)

1.2.3 Idolatry

An idol is something you _____ ¹⁰ instead of God. (Exodus 20:3-6)

An idol is something you _____ ¹¹ instead of God. (Isaiah 42:17; Jeremiah 17:5-8)

An idol is something you _____ ¹² instead of God. (Ephesians 5:5; Philippians 3:19; Colossians 3:5)

1.3 Avoiding Conflict (Sanctification)

“Just two choices on the shelf, pleasing God and pleasing self.”

My goal in life is to _____ ¹³. (2 Corinthians 5:9, 14-15)

I please God by being like _____ ¹⁴. (Matthew 3:17; Romans 8:28-29)

God doesn't expect me to be _____ ¹⁵ (1 John 1:8-9), but He does expect me to be _____ ¹⁶ (Ephesians 4:22-24; 2 Peter 3:18).

1.4 Resolving Conflict (Forgiveness)

1.4.1 Definition and Characteristics of Forgiveness

- To “forgive” means to “pardon” or “_____”¹⁷ a debt owed.” (Colossians 2:13-14)
- Forgiveness is a _____¹⁸ (Jeremiah 31:34; Romans 4:7-8) not to hold the offender liable for the wrong they did.
- Human forgiveness is based on _____¹⁹ forgiveness. (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32)
- “Forgiveness is always undeserved by the one who receives it (he deserves to pay the penalty or debt).”²⁰ (Luke 7:41-42)
- Forgiveness costs the one granting forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). The forgiver gives up his right to repayment or revenge.

1.4.2 It’s Always Your Move

When _____²¹ sin against _____²². (Matthew 5:23-24)

When _____²³ sins against _____²⁴. (Matthew 18:15; Mark 11:25; Luke 17:3)

Cover sins with _____²⁵. (1 Peter 4:8; Proverbs 19:11)

Note: “To overlook [or cover] means while you have indeed been personally offended, you chose not to react on the basis of that fact, but deal with the offense with patience and graciousness, because you are looking more to the glory of God and the good of the other person. Our need to initially ‘overlook’ our own injury does not release us from our own duty to hold our wives accountable for sin.” Appendix Nine, page 363, *The Exemplary Husband*.

1.4.3 How to Ask for Forgiveness

Saying “I’m sorry” expresses an emotion but does not take responsibility. Instead:

1. **Confess** (acknowledge) that you sinned (James 5:16). Recognize that sin is first and foremost an offense against God (Genesis 39:7-9; Luke 15:18,21). Do not use minimizing weasel words, excuses, rationalizations or justifications. Take responsibility for your actions. Say “I sinned.” Example: David when confronted by Nathan (2 Samuel 12:13).
2. **Identify** your sin by its biblical name (Mark 7:21-22; Galatians 5:19-21). Example: Achan when confronted by Joshua (Joshua 7:20-21).
3. **Repent**, that is, identify alternative biblical behaviors and commit yourself to a plan for behaving differently. (Ephesians 4:22-32)
4. **Ask** for forgiveness from God (1 John 1:9) and the one you sinned against (Luke 17:3). Say “Please, forgive me.” Asking forgiveness transfers responsibility for action to the offended party. The offended party must now choose to forgive.

You can remember these four steps using the acronym “CIRA” (the “c” is pronounced like “k” as in “confess”).

1.4.4 How to Grant Forgiveness

- Granting forgiveness is a _____²⁶. (Matthew 18:21-35)
- Forgiveness is not a _____²⁷. (Luke 17:3-10)
- When you forgive someone, you _____²⁸ not to remind:
 - the offender
 - others
 - yourself (i.e. dwelling on it in self-pity)

of the debt that was canceled.

2 Communication²⁹

“What we’ve got here is a failure to communicate.” – *Cool Hand Luke*

2.1 Why Observe Rules for Communication?

2.1.1 We are Accountable to God for Our Words

- “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:34-37)

2.1.2 Controlling Our Tongue is Difficult

- “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well...no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison...from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.” (James 3:2-12)

2.1.3 Three Ways that Communication Rules can Help

1. Plan and rehearse my communication so that I can give a good accounting to God for my words
2. Analyze my past (failed) communication so that I know what to change
3. Analyze others’ past (failed) communication so that I can help them know what to change:
 - “The wise in heart will be called understanding, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.” (Proverbs 16:21)
 - “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” (Proverbs 16:24)

2.2 *Eight Rules for Biblical Communication (1+3+4)*

1 rule from Matthew + 3 rules from Proverbs + 4 rules from Ephesians = 8

2.2.1 Judge Yourself First

- “Do not _____³⁰ so that you will not be judged.” (Matthew 7:1)
- “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your _____³¹, it will be measured to you.” (Matthew 7:2)
- “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You _____³², first take the log out of _____³³ eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:3-5)
- “Do not give what is _____³⁴ to dogs, and do not throw your _____³⁵ before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matthew 7:6)

2.2.2 Listen First

- “A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind.” (Proverbs 18:2)
- “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.” (Proverbs 18:13)

2.2.3 Speak at the Right Time

- “A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word!” (Proverbs 15:23)
- “Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.” (Proverbs 25:11)

2.2.4 Speak Concisely

- “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” (Proverbs 10:19)
- “The voice of a fool [comes] through many words.” (Ecclesiastes 5:3)

2.2.5 Speak Truth with Love

Speak the _____³⁶ (Ephesians 4:25)

Speak the _____³⁷ in _____³⁸ (Ephesians 4:15)

2.2.6 Resolve Conflicts Quickly

- “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.” (Ephesians 4:26-27)

Anger is _____³⁹ to be used in solving problems.

Solve the problem _____⁴⁰.

Problems should be solved before the sun goes down, that is, today. When conflict occurs, it can be helpful to wait a short amount of time (half an hour to 2 hours) to allow the initial adrenaline rush of anger to pass. Use this brief “time out” to pray (Phil 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17), honestly examine your role in the conflict (Matthew 7:1-5) and regain self-control (Proverbs 25:28, 29:11). Waiting longer than that risks giving the devil an opportunity to blow the problem out of all proportion, making the conflict that much harder to resolve.

2.2.7 Attack the Problem, Not the Person

- “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Ephesians 4:29-30)

Unwholesome words target a person’s character, fruitlessly _____⁴¹ the conflict and _____⁴² energy on secondary issues.

Edifying words diffuse tension, lower defenses and encourage responsibility.

- They focus on identifying unbiblical _____⁴³ and _____⁴⁴.
- They seek to understand _____⁴⁵ and _____⁴⁶.

2.2.8 Act, Don't React

- “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Put off fleshly reactions:

_____ ⁴⁷ - the refusal to treat someone as if they never hurt you

_____ ⁴⁸ - outbursts of rage like a volcano

_____ ⁴⁹ - slow burn; settle indignation

_____ ⁵⁰ - harsh contention and strife; public quarreling

_____ ⁵¹ - speech that injures; abusive speech

_____ ⁵² - desire to harm others or see them suffer

Put on godly actions:

_____ ⁵³ - benevolent, helpful, courteous

_____ ⁵⁴ - compassionate, sympathetic

_____ ⁵⁵ - to pass over an offense and free the offender from the guilt of it

3 Homework

Read the article “Getting to the Heart of Conflict”⁵⁶ and underline (or highlight with a marker) the 10 most significant sentences.

Read chapters 16 and 17 in *The Exemplary Husband* and *The Excellent Wife*. Underline the 10 most significant sentences in each chapter.

4 End Notes

¹ Selfish ambition

² Sinful desire

³ satisfies

⁴ fulfills

⁵ in order to

⁶ because

⁷ heart

⁸ Error

⁹ deceitful

¹⁰ worship

¹¹ trust

¹² desire

¹³ please God

¹⁴ Jesus Christ

¹⁵ perfect

¹⁶ growing

¹⁷ cancel

¹⁸ promise

¹⁹ God's

²⁰ *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, Jay Adams, page 149.

²¹ you

²² someone

²³ someone

²⁴ you

²⁵ love

²⁶ command

²⁷ feeling

²⁸ promise

²⁹ Principles 5-8 are based on NANC's counseling and discipleship training material.

³⁰ judge

³¹ standard of measure

³² hypocrite

³³ your own

³⁴ holy

³⁵ pearls

³⁶ truth

³⁷ truth

³⁸ love

³⁹ energy

⁴⁰ today

⁴¹ escalate

⁴² waste

⁴³ thinking

⁴⁴ behavior

⁴⁵ goals

⁴⁶ motives

⁴⁷ bitterness

⁴⁸ wrath

⁴⁹ anger

⁵⁰ clamor

⁵¹ slander

⁵² malice

⁵³ kindness

⁵⁴ tender-hearted

⁵⁵ forgiveness

⁵⁶ <http://www.peacemaker.net/site/lookup.asp?c=aqKFLTOBIpH&b=958147>