

Introduction: Taking Jesus seriously

³¹Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, (then) you are truly disciples of Mine; ³²and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 8:31-32

“He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me: and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.”

John 14:21

²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.... ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

Matthew 7:24, 26

Taking Jesus seriously means we take His **WORD** seriously!

So . . .

W.D.J.S.?

³⁴ “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34-35

- What is the New Commandment?
- When was the New Commandment given?
- Why was the New Commandment given?
- How seriously did the early Church take the New Commandment?

Our Challenge?

To take Jesus' words **SERIOUSLY**, “to **LOVE** one another.”

- Why is this so critical?
- What Does this mean for **you**?

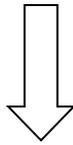
Discussion Questions:

1. According to Jesus, how seriously did/does He expect His followers to take His Words? Explain.
2. What is the difference between the old commandments and this new command?
3. Why do you think Jesus only gave one new commandment? Why this one?
4. What would the church look like if we all took this new commandment as seriously as the early church did?
5. What will "taking seriously" John 13:34 look like in your personal life **this week**?

Introduction:

Why are there so many people **desperately hurting** and in need of love, and so many others who are so **willing** and **wanting** to give love, yet so few who actually get loved?

What's the missing link?



6 Key Words:

YOU ARE MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

Thesis: To fulfill Jesus' command to love one another, as He loved us ...
... demands that we understand our membership and function in
"HIS SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY."

You are members of a supernatural community:

What makes it supernatural?

- It has a **supernatural** ORIGIN.

¹In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ²until the day He was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. ³After His suffering, He showed Himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God.

Acts 1:1-3

- It has a **supernatural** AGENDA.

⁴On one occasion, while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” ⁶So when they met together, they asked Him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority.

Acts 1:4-7

- It has a **supernatural** POWER.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8

What makes it authentic community?

- Possessing an accurate view of ourselves.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Romans 12:3

Key word = VULNERABILITY

- Nurturing a healthy appreciation of others.

⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, ...

Romans 12:4-5a

Key word = THANKFULNESS

- Practicing a loyal allegiance to one another.

... and each member belongs to all the others.

Romans 12:5b

Key word = COMMITMENT

Application:

1. No individual Christian can function effectively by himself/herself.
2. No member of the “supernatural community” is more or less important than anyone else.
3. We must “**get connected**” in real life relationships if we are to experience the reality that “we are members of one another.”

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think it is important to understand our unity/membership in God’s family in order to obey John 13:34?
2. What makes us a “supernatural” community? Why is this important?
3. What are the most common hindrances to us experiencing “real community” in our relationships?
4. Which of those hindrances are keeping you from receiving or giving love right now?
5. What are you going to ask God to do to help you with this hindrance?

Introduction:

Renowned psychotherapist concludes, “There must be a better way.”

“Imagine what could happen if God were to place within his people intangible nutrients that had the power to both prevent and reverse soul disease and then told us to share those nutrients with each other in a special kind of intimate relating called connection. Imagine what could happen if that were true, if we believed it, and if we devoted ourselves to understanding what those nutrients were and how we could give them away.

I envision a community of people who intentionally mingle in settings where these nutrients are passed back and forth, where I pour into you the healing resources within me and you pour into me what God has put in you. Like spiritual gifts, these nutrients only nourish our own souls as we give them away for the blessing of others.

In recent days, I have made a shift. I am now working toward the day when communities of God’s people, ordinary Christians whose lives regularly intersect, will accomplish most of the good that we now depend on mental health professionals to provide. And they will do it by connecting with each other in ways that only the gospel makes possible.”

Dr. Larry Crabb

Question: What is this “better way” and how does it work?

God's Answer: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love."

Romans 12:10

- What does it mean to be "devoted to one another?"
- What does it look like to be "devoted to one another?"
- What keeps us from experiencing this authentic devotion one to another?
 1. It doesn't happen **AUTOMATICALLY**.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10
1 Peter 1:22-23
2 Peter 1:5-7
 2. It takes time, effort, and **INTENTIONALLY**.
 3. It is especially difficult for some of us to share at the "feeling" level because:
 - We fear **REJECTION**.
 - We come from poor **FAMILY BACKGROUNDS**.
 - We've had negative **CHURCH EXPERIENCES**.
 4. Personal unresolved **ANGER** and **BITTERNESS**.
 5. Excessive preoccupation with **OURSELVES**.
 6. Failure to recognize our **LIMITATIONS** and personal **CAPACITIES** in relationships.
 7. Idealistic / Unrealistic **EXPECTATIONS**.

How can you develop deeper “family relationships”?

1. Honestly evaluate your level of “connectedness” and family devotion.
2. Identify the top two factors that are keeping you from building warmer, deeper relationships in God’s family.

Factor # 1 =

Factor # 2 =
3. Prayerfully determine which **SUB-GROUP** you would be most comfortable with.
4. Prayerfully decide on a specific time, event, or activity that would allow you to “take the next step” toward devotion and connection. (If possible, ask someone to go with you.)
5. Join a Growth Group or Ministry Team for a specified, limited time.
6. Be friendly – even if it doesn’t come naturally.
7. Ask God to let you find someone who feels “less connected” than you this week and love them.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think it is important to understand our unity/membership in God's family in order to obey John 13:34?
2. How might "authentic devotion to one another" change how unbelievers view God's people and the Gospel?
3. What are the top two factors that are keeping you from building warmer, deeper relationships in God's family?
4. Discuss when and how you can develop deeper relationships. What most concerns you about taking the "next step?" Why? Pray for each other.

Introduction: To love each other the way Jesus loved His disciples means we must ...

... ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER,

JUST AS CHRIST ACCEPTED US,

IN ORDER TO BRING GLORY TO GOD!

“Connecting is a kind of relating that happens when the powerful life of Christ in one person meets the good life of Christ in another. What every Christian can pour into another is **the powerful passion of acceptance**, a passion that flows out of the center of the gospel, a passion that fills the heart of God.”

Dr. Larry Crabb – *Connecting*, page 66

What does it mean to “accept one another?”

- Meaning of the word “Accept”
- Meaning from the context Romans 15:1-6
- Meaning from the New Testament
- Meaning from the text Romans 15:7

What keeps us from “accepting one another?”

1. **LEGALISM** Romans 14
Judging others’ faith by extra-Biblical standards.
2. **FAVORITISM** 2 Corinthians 5:16
Judging other by external appearance or possessions. James 2:1-5
3. **PRE-JUDGING** Luke 6:37
Judging others based on preconceived notions about them.
4. **MIND-READING** 1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Judging others in areas that are impossible for us to assess.

Does “acceptance” mean we are never to judge?

NO! – We are commanded to judge ...

1. ... interpersonal conflict in the church. 1 Corinthians 6:2-5
2. ... immoral behavior in the church. 1 Corinthians 5:1-6
1 Timothy 5:20
3. ... those who sin against us. Matthew 18:15-17
4. ... when placed in positions of spiritual responsibility. 2 Timothy 4:1-3
5. ... to maintain doctrinal purity. 2 Timothy 4:15
6. ... when church unity is threatened. Titus 1:10
1 Timothy 5:20

How can we grow in “accepting one another?”

1. **Remember** what is at stake!
2. **Refuse** to compare!
3. **Renew** your view of others!

DESIRE CARD

*“I would like to view others in light of their
eternity and need,
instead of by their outward appearance,
possessions, status, or abilities.”*

Memorize: 2 Corinthians 5:16

Discussion Questions:

1. Who has shown real acceptance of you that made a difference in your life? How did they do that?
2. Summarize what it means to accept one another biblically.
3. With which of the four “enemies of acceptance” do you most identify? What is behind our “improper judging” of others?
4. Why is it important for us to realize that not all judging is wrong?
5. What steps would God have you take in deepening your **acceptance** of others? How will you know if you are making progress?

Introduction: Life is hard! God is good! I am weak!

Sometimes the only difference between success and failure...

... is a simple word of **ENCOURAGEMENT!**

What is encouragement?

- Meaning of the word:
- Use in the New Testament:
- Use in the Old Testament:

Summary:

We are to aid, help, support, and intercede for each other by means of comforting in affliction, strengthening in faith, and motivating toward righteousness. In short, encouragement (building up others) is taking the **truth of Scripture** by life and word in the context of meaningful and caring relationships, to **restore perspective** and, thereby, provide hope which carries us through affliction and above complacency.

Why is encouragement so important?

- Because God commands it 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- Because sin is deceitful Hebrews 3:13
- Because spiritual growth requires it 1 Thessalonians 3:2
- Because we lose perspective so easily 2 Corinthians 7:3-7

What does Biblical encouragement look like?

The Hebrews 10 Model of Encouragement:

¹⁹ **Since** *therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh ...*

²¹ *and since {we have} a great priest over the house of God ...*

²² **let us draw near** *with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled {clean} from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

²³ **Let us hold fast** *the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful...*

²⁴ *and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,* ²⁵ *not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging {one another} and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.*

Examining the structure of Hebrews 10:19-25

1. Two facts – Two eternal truths

❖ **Since** we have access into God’s presence. Hebrews 10:19

❖ **Since** we never go into God’s presence alone. Hebrews 10:21

2. Three exhortations – Three timeless principles

➤ “Let us draw near ...” Hebrews 10:22
Biblical encouragement restores perspective

➤ “Let us hold fast ...” Hebrews 10:23
Biblical encouragement promotes endurance

➤ “Let us stimulate one another ...” Hebrews 10:24
Biblical encouragement inspires spiritual growth

How?

1. By stimulating one another to Christ-like attitudes and actions in relationships.
2. By refusing to allow one another to “drift” from regular attendance at worship or small group times.
3. By reminding one another of the certainty and accountability involved in Christ’s return.

Discussion Questions:

1. Who do you know who needs some encouragement?
2. What **truth** (Biblical passage) would help restore their perspective? Endure their adversity? Be stimulated to spiritual growth?
3. What would be the best way to communicate your encouragement to them?
 - ~ In person
 - ~ In a group
 - ~ By phone
 - ~ Through some act of kindness
 - ~ By letter
 - ~ By meeting a need
4. When, this week, will you become God’s agent of blessing in this person’s life?
5. Pray for those you have determined to encourage this week.

Introduction:

“The best, the deepest, and the closest friends I have, or have ever had, all have **one thing in common** ... they have each loved me enough to tell me some things about my life that no one else cared enough to tell me.”

A critical command:

“And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.”

Romans 15:14

Admonition – What is it?

I. Definition: To exert influence upon another (by life and word) to guide him/her into obedience of God’s will as revealed in Scripture. “It consists of reminding, warning, counseling, correcting, reproving, and rebuking a person with the intention that he/she will carry it out.”

Colin Brown, *Dictionary of the New Testament*

II. Clarification: What admonition is not!

- It is not **JUDGING** another’s life that does not conform to your standards.
- It is not a **SUPERIOR** or more spiritual person speaking down to an inferior or unspiritual person.
- It is not allowing things to remain the way they are for fear of **REJECTION**.
- It is not making **GENERAL / VEILED STATEMENTS** to a group, hoping that the one you want to hear it will catch it.
- It is not a **ONE-TIME** shot and if they don’t respond, then I have done my duty.

Why must we admonish one another?

- It is a **COMMAND**.
Colossians 3:16
1 Thessalonians 5:14
- Because we all have "**BLIND SPOTS**."
Psalm 19:12
Psalm 139:23-24
- To become godly, holy, **MATURE CHRISTIANS**.
Colossians 1:28-29
- It cultivates deep, **LOVING RELATIONSHIPS**.
1 Thessalonians 2:8
- Because sin **DESTROYS** a believer's life.
Romans 6:23
- Because we are **MEMBERS** of one another.
Unchecked sin impacts the whole body
Romans 12:4-5

Why we don't admonish one another:

Who is competent to admonish?

1. It requires a life “full of goodness”

Romans 15:14

- In general terms, we are living a holy, righteous life. Matthew 7:3-5
- We must “clean up our own act” before we can help others clean up theirs.

2. It requires a life “filled with knowledge”

Romans 15:14

- ...of God’s Word Colossians 3:16
- We must be careful to admonish with regard to the absolutes of Scripture, not in areas that are extra-Biblical.

3. It requires a “heart filled with love”

- “not to shame, but as beloved children...” 1 Corinthians 4:14
- “night and day with tears ...” Acts 20:31
- “as a brother ...” 2 Thessalonians 3:15
- “as a father with his children ...” Ephesians 6:4

How to admonish – “the process”

Step #1: Examine your own life. Matthew 7:3-5

Step #2: Examine the Word. 2 Timothy 2:15

Step #3: Examine your motives. 1 Corinthians 4:14

Step #4: Set a time to meet privately. Matthew 18:15

Step #5: Ask specific questions to confirm data, and disarm the situation.

Step #6: Tenderly point out the sin; show them the Scripture that applies to them.

Step #7: If possible, develop a game-plan, timetable, and follow-up meeting for support and follow-through.

Conclusion:

Admonition is God’s antibiotic for the church; done Biblically, it is the most loving thing you can do ... for all concerned.

Discussion Questions:

1. Is there a relationship or situation that needs my attention?
2. Do you love this person enough to “speak the truth in love?”
3. With God’s help, I will ...
 - pray
 - examine my life
 - act _____ (day of this week)

Introduction:

How important is living in harmony?

Jesus prayed for it -

John 17:20-23

Scripture commands it -

Romans 12:16
Romans 14:19
Romans 15:5-6
Ephesians 4:3
Philippians 1:27
Philippians 2:1-2

The Church practiced it -

Acts 2:46
Acts 4:32-35

The world was transformed by it -

Acts 2:47
Acts 6:7

What causes disharmony or conflict?

Growth / Unmet Needs -

Acts 6:1-6

Theological Differences -

Acts 15:1-15

Philosophical Differences -

Acts 15:16-41

Personality Differences -

Philippians 4:2-3

Carnality -

1 Corinthians 1:10-13
1 Corinthians 3:1-23

- Critic
- Martyr
- Wet blanket
- Steam roller
- Gossip
- Control freak
- Back stabber
- Cold shoulder
- Volcano
- Sponge
- Workhorse
- Chameleon

How can we restore harmony in relationships?

1. Refuse to **TOLERATE** disunity.

Romans 12:18

“...as far as it depends on you...”

- Don't avoid it!
- Don't procrastinate!
- Don't delegate it!
- Don't rationalize it!

2. Embrace **CONFLICT** as normal and unavoidable. John 16:33

3. Be the **INITIATOR** in conflict resolution.
 - When it is perceived to be **your** fault. Matthew 5:24

 - When you perceive it to be **their** fault. Matthew 18:15

4. Deal with **YOU** before you deal with them. Luke 6:41-42

5. **Meet together ASAP and outline the issue!**
 - The **WHAT** - Calmly describe what you perceive the other person is doing to cause the issue.
 - The **HOW** - Tell how this makes you feel.
 - The **WHY** - Tell why this is important to you.

 - The **QUESTION** - What are we going to do to fix it?
 - **ENCOURAGE** their response and feedback.
 - **WRITE** down the desired action to be taken.
 - **SET** a specific time to revisit the issue.
 - **COMMITMENT** by both sides to put the issue in the past once solved.

6. If resolution does not occur, follow the Biblical guidelines of Matthew 18

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen to even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Matthew 18:15-17

Conclusion:

“How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.” Psalm 133:1

Discussion Questions:

1. Is there a relationship in your life that is out of harmony?
2. Why is it so important we guard the unity of Christ’s Body, the Church? What is at stake?
3. Why do you think following God’s pattern of conflict resolution is so difficult for us?
4. What would trusting God in obedience look like in your life in response to this message?

See: “Making Peace At Home”
<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200404/making-peace-home>

Introduction: Two extremes!

- ❖ Exhibit A: Passive Indifference
- ❖ Exhibit B: Painful Insensitivity

Review: The teaching of Jesus

Matthew 18:15-17

Step 1: Private conference

Matthew 18:15

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

Step 2: Small group confrontation

Matthew 18:16

But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses’.

Step 3: Public disclosure

Matthew 18:17a

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; ...

Step 4: Public exclusion

Matthew 18:17b

... and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.



The Question:

How do we restore those who have fallen?

The Answer:

¹ Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:1-2

What does Galatians 6:1-2 mean?

The Situation: A fellow Christian is “caught” (overcome) by a sin.

The Command: The spiritually mature are to restore this believer.

The Method: Gentleness is to characterize our attitude and the process.

The Warning: Restoration is a dangerous process even for the mature.

The Summary: “Bearing one another’s burdens” involves the arduous task of confrontation, forgiveness, comfort, and loving fallen believers back to a position of fellowship and former fruitfulness.

(see 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 & Luke 15:11-32)

Conclusion: We serve the God of “second chances.”

We will all “fall” to some degree at some time.

We must resist our fears and insecurities that lead to **passive indifference**.

We must resist our desire for justice and self-righteous tendencies that lead to **painful insensitivity**.

We must **restore**, not “shoot our wounded.”

How can we fail to do for another what Christ has done for us?

Discussion Questions:

What information in this message was new to you?

Where have you seen Church discipline done well with the right attitude and motive?

Is there a “fallen” Christian in your relational network? Might God be asking you to begin or help the restoration process?

Are you willing to “enter the fray” to attempt to restore someone Christ died to save?

Thesis:

Sometimes the person we most want God to **REMOVE** from our lives is the person we **NEED** the most.

Why? because ...

... the way we treat difficult people reveals the true condition of our heart.

... difficult people cause us to grow in ways we couldn't on our own.

... the most distinguishing mark of Jesus' followers is their love for those they **would not** and **could not** love on their own.

How can we love the un-loveable?

We are to “bear with” difficult people

² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3

The meaning of “bearing with one another”:

What does “bearing with” others look like?

- **With humility** – See them and treat them as people of equal or superior value than yourself.

- **With gentleness** – Extend undeserved acts of kindness and acceptance that are foreign to you with this person.

- **With patience** – Refuse to allow your irritation and frustration to erupt into negative thoughts, feelings, and comments to or about them.

- **With forgiveness** – Release them from your internal desire to pay them back for the frustration, difficulty, and wounds they inflicted upon you.

¹² Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Colossians 3:12-14

Why is “bearing with” difficult people so important?

1. It increases my appreciation of God’s love toward me.
2. It demonstrates God’s love toward them.
3. It changes me where I need it most.
4. It communicates the reality and authenticity of Christ to the world.

Conclusion:

Sometimes the person I most want God to remove from my life is the very person I need the most!

Action Steps:

1. Identify the most difficult person in your life right now.
2. Begin praying everyday for this person for the next two weeks.
3. Stop consciously avoiding them and start seeing them like Christ does.
(see Colossians 3:12)
4. Serve them in some specific way this week.
5. Discuss these action steps with your friends, family, growth group, Bible study, and/or ministry team.

Introduction: “There is no limit to what God will do if we don’t care who gets the credit!”

I. Honoring others above ourselves is the “acid test” of how much we really love one another:

¹ It was just before the Passover Feast, Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love. ² The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. ⁵ After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.

John 13:1-5

¹² When He had finished washing their feet, He put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

John 13:12-17

Key observations:

1. Honoring others is motivated by **LOVE**.
2. Security in God’s plan allows us to choose **DOWNWARD MOBILITY**.
3. Honoring others begins with **HUMILITY**.
4. Position and power are stewardships for **SERVICE**.
5. Real happiness comes when we make others **SHINE**, not hog the limelight.

Summary:

Honoring others is enjoying and celebrating the worth, success, and accomplishments of others more than my own.

II. What does “honoring others” look like in your life?

Step 1: Evaluate

- When was the last time you honored someone above yourself?

Step 2: Questions to ponder

- Do you compliment others sincerely?

- Do you enjoy the success of others?

- Can you let others be the center of attention?

- Can you allow others to get credit even when you had a major role?

- Do you feel bad, slighted, hurt, or angry when your work or service goes unnoticed?

III. What happens when we honor others above ourselves?

- The **Great** paradox Philippians 2:9-11

- The **Awesome** promise Matthew 23:5-12

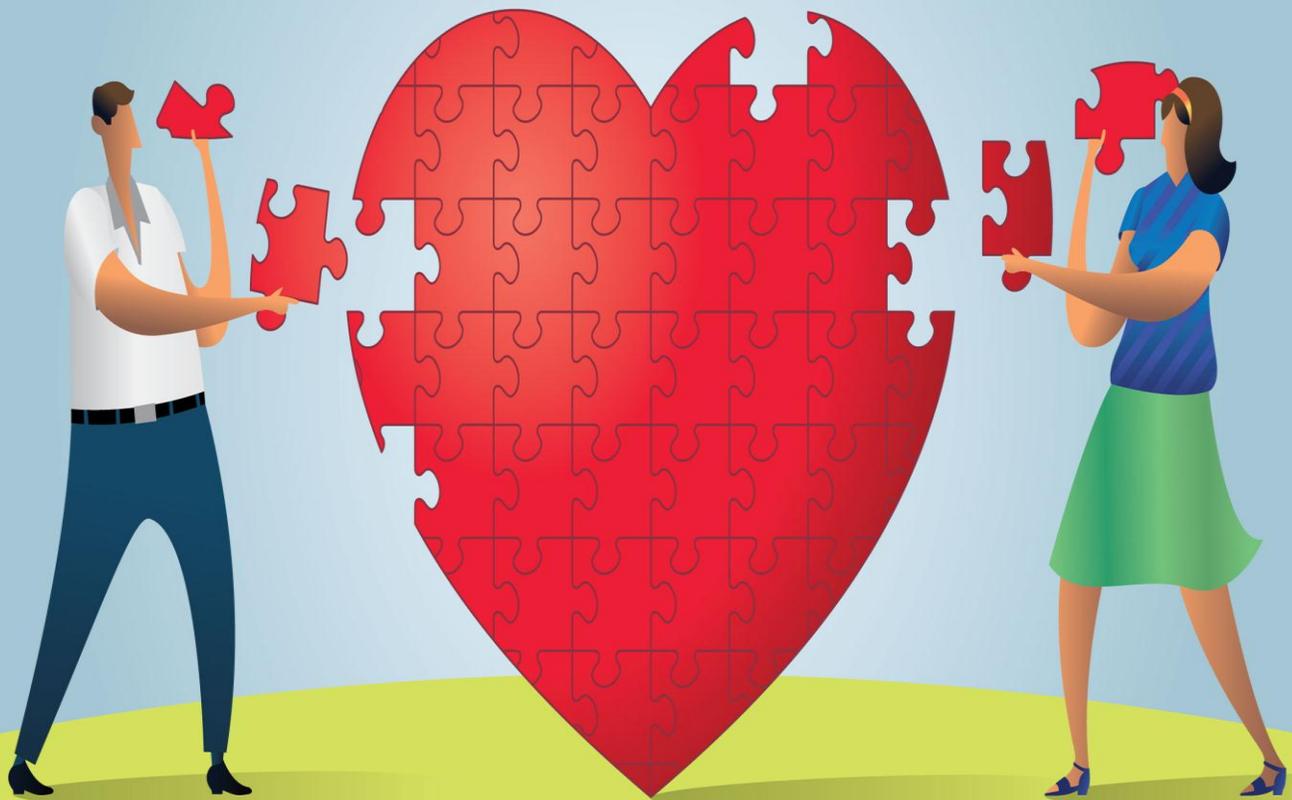
- The **Timeless** prayer St Francis of Assisi

Conclusion:

Many relationships start well, but few end well. Those who habitually honor others build friendships that last a lifetime.

Making Peace At Home

*A Practical Tool for Understanding and
Resolving Conflict in Marriage*



Chip Ingram

I couldn't believe it. This couldn't be happening to us. How could two people who love each other and love God feel so angry towards one another? We had only been married a few weeks, and I found myself with feelings that were completely foreign to our relationship. As I walked out, I slammed the screen door in disgust! She was crying. I was mad. And I knew it wasn't supposed to be this way.

I am waiting for her to turn to me and say "I'm sorry" and she's waiting for me to do the same.

Welcome to Marriage 101! This was the first fight Theresa and I had in our early life together. I drove around for nearly two hours trying to figure out what was wrong. I naively assumed that couples who loved God and loved each other wouldn't have angry feelings and hurt one another this deeply. I was greatly mistaken and painfully disillusioned.

The night is late and very still. My hands are behind my head as I stare at the ceiling in the quiet of the night. I can hear Theresa breathing, and I know she's not asleep. The events of the day produced some major rifts between us, and we don't have them resolved. I want to talk because I am very angry; Theresa wants to withdraw because she's very hurt. I am waiting for her to turn to me and say, "I'm sorry," and she's waiting for me to do the same. The night remains still and we both occupy the same bed in cold silence. Finally, in disgust and in an effort to communicate how angry I really am, I let out a "great sigh" and turn away from her in the bed. I have a brief conversation with God expressing my hurt and rehearsing how she has wounded me that day, and slowly I drift off to sleep.

A funny thing happened in the morning. I don't feel quite as bad...But I find myself picking on Theresa.

A funny thing happens in the morning. I don't feel quite as bad and I don't feel quite as angry. But I find myself picking on Theresa and taking opportunity to put her down with sarcasm and innuendoes. I don't know that my anger is unresolved and I haven't yet learned how to diffuse conflict in our marriage; so we play games, deepen the damage, and continue to wound one another until neither of us can take it anymore.

Do these two scenarios sound familiar? The first was early in our marriage, the second continued for the next 10 to 12 years of our life together. Oh yes, we eventually made up and got things out on the table, but the price tag was very high. Because of our commitment to the Lord and to each other, we *chose* to continue working out our struggles. But that's not always the case with couples. Unless you learn how to diffuse conflict in your relationship, sometimes it escalates to the point where repair is difficult or impossible, humanly speaking.

This booklet is designed to help you diffuse the conflict in your marriage. As we begin, I'd like to make four observations that I think are critical to understanding conflict. Next, I'd like to give you a very practical tool that I believe God can use to diffuse even the deepest of conflicts in a marriage relationship.

God's Perspective on Conflict

Before we get into the hands-on, practical aspects of “making peace,” it is critical that we step back and get a broad understanding of relational conflict and its root causes. Often we assume something is very wrong simply because we have conflict in a meaningful relationship. But the truth is that great relationships are never “conflict free.” We need to understand conflict and its sources and learn how to handle it appropriately. The following four observations will provide an intellectual and biblical foundation for understanding the conflict in your life.

If death and taxes are the first two certainties of life, conflict is the third.

Observation #1: Conflict is inevitable in a fallen world.

The issue is not whether conflict is going to happen; the only issue is how we are going to deal with it. Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you *will have trouble* [emphasis added]. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

In the book, *Leaders on Leadership*, one author writes, “If death and taxes are the first two certainties of life, conflict is the third. Life requires conflict! It is an essential part of God’s redeeming plan. Through conflict we know our need, acknowledge our sin, recognize truth, and it is by conflict God tests our faith.” Conflict isn’t bad; it’s inevitable in a fallen world.

Observation #2: Conflict flows from our differences

- Differences in belief or thinking produce conflict.

When people have different beliefs concerning what is true or right, it produces division in relationships. The first major theological conflict in the New Testament occurs when the apostle Paul and Barnabas return from their first missionary journey. Some Jews who had become Christians were teaching that circumcision was a necessary part of salvation. Paul and Barnabas vigorously disagreed. Theological conflict, or conflict involving authority issues, arises when the question is, “What is true?” or “What is right?” (Acts 15:1-35). Conflict will naturally occur when our belief systems differ. This is why it is so important, as couples, to allow Christ and His Word to be the final authority in our relationships.

- Differences in *perspective* also produce conflict.

Sometimes people have different philosophical views about what should be done and why. In Acts 15:36-41, we see a perspective conflict. Paul and Barnabas are preparing for their second missionary journey and Barnabas desires to take John Mark on a trip with them. Paul and Barnabas have a “sharp disagreement” (literally, a “schism”) over this issue of taking John Mark. *It is not a matter of who’s right or who’s wrong, it’s a matter of differences in perspective.* Paul is a very task-oriented person who is committed to not endangering the fruitfulness of the mission by allowing a person with proven deficiencies to go along on the trip. As you study the New Testament, you might remember that John Mark went on the first missionary journey

and, for reasons unknown, quit and returned home. Paul, wanting to protect the integrity of the mission says, "Mark can't go." Barnabas, a compassionate encourager, sees the trip as an opportunity to develop and help John Mark grow through the failure and insists "he must go." The sharp disagreement occurs and these life-long friends part ways over a difference in perspective.

Conflict in marriage often centers on our attempts to determine "who is right." In every relationship, we bring different backgrounds, gifts, and experiences that shape our perspectives. *It's not always a matter of right or wrong.* Until we learn to see things through our mate's perspective and communicate light instead of heat, these differences can tear us apart.

- Differences in *style* also produce conflict

In personality conflicts, the question is, "Who is best?" Two people may both be very godly, but one may be an extrovert and the other an introvert. One person may want the details in a situation, while the other only wants the big picture. One person may want everyone to be involved in a project, while someone else would rather do it alone. These differences aren't a matter of spirituality or right and wrong; they are a matter of style. As couples, we must learn to make allowances for our different personalities and styles.

The fact is, God normally gives us a strong attraction to someone with a style much different than our own. These differences that initially attract us, however, can be the source of tremendous conflict later in the relationship. As couples, we must learn to build on the best of both styles rather than making them issues of comparison and conflict. Theresa and I could not be more different when it comes to the area of style, and it has produced incredible conflict in our relationship. But over the years, with much practice and by the grace of God, we have learned to build on our differences rather than fight over them. God wants to teach you how to do the same thing. It's a lifelong process, but by His grace it can be done.

Observation #3: Selfish desires produce conflict.

Much of our conflict flows out of "plain old selfishness," or sin.

The apostle James writes, "What causes fights and quarrels amount you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:1-3).

The word "desires" in this passage means lusts, passions, or selfish appetites. James is pointing out that much of our conflict flows out of "plain old selfishness," or sin. This, unlike the other causes of conflict, has a spiritual origin and will continue to cause us grief until we get to heaven.

Until we learn to communicate light instead of heat, these differences can tear us apart.

But James tells us that there is a *solution* and there is *hope*. If we ask God to show us what is best for the relationship, He promises to show us. Sometimes, we simply ask God to be on “our team” and fulfill “our agenda.” For example, we pray, “God, make my wife more affectionate,” or “God, make my husband take time to listen to me.” God doesn’t answer those prayers if our motives are simply to improve “our side” of the relationship. Rather, we need to ask Him to work in both of us to accomplish His will for *our* relationship.

We must constantly remember that we are fallen people. Because of Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to have our sins forgiven, to have the Holy Spirit come into our lives, to be adopted into His family, and to be given a brand new identity. Yet, we still live in a fallen world, and our flesh wages war against the Spirit.

In the flesh, we have old habits, and there are times when our lusts lead us instead of the Spirit. This causes conflict! In a word, it is often my own carnality that brings conflict into my marriage. This is why the greatest thing I can ever do for my marriage is to walk wholeheartedly with Christ. Only He has the power to deliver me from my selfish, relational patterns.

In a word, it is often my own carnality that brings conflict into my marriage.

I hope you are beginning to get the picture that conflict is normal in a fallen world. As long as people are different in their perspective, background, philosophy, and personality, let alone the spiritual issue of selfishness, conflict will be an ever-present companion. But the news is not all bad. In fact, the Scriptures teach us that conflict is one of the major ways God allows us to grow.

Observation #4: Conflict is an opportunity for growth

The heart of New Testament teaching about conflict resolution is found in Philippians 2:1-4. In Christ, our differences are designed to complete our relationship with one another instead of being vehicles of competition. In Christ, our differences complement one another rather than becoming weapons we use to attack each other. In Christ, selfishness can be transformed into servanthood.

Do you want your own way? Certainly! But in the power of Christ, you and I can be so filled with the love of God that we can choose to be servants and build into the lives of our mates instead of demanding our own way. This allows transformation, not only in our hearts, but also in our relationships.

You see, the intimacy that I share with my wife has grown as I have begun to understand *how different we are and how much she needs what I have to offer, and vice versa*. But it is only by the grace of God that I can put my own needs on hold and temporarily “suspend my selfish demands” in order to think through what’s happening in our relationship and what God, in fact, wants me to do. Is this natural? No! Is this easy? No! Is this a fruitful, powerful way to enjoy a deep relationship with your life partner? Absolutely yes!

Beware of Sharks and Turtles

Two ways of dealing with life's inevitable conflicts

Before sharing a very specific game plan to help you diffuse the conflict in your relationship, I think it's very important to remember that there are *healthy* and *unhealthy* ways to deal with conflict.

Over the years, both in my own marriage and in counseling with numerous couples, I have learned that most of us fall into two major categories; we are either *turtles* or *sharks*. When there is danger or conflict, turtles pull their heads into their shells, tuck in all their appendages, and withdraw to a safe place. When turtles feel threatened, the immediate response is to withdraw. This is what my wife did in the early years of our marriage. It made me absolutely crazy!

By contrast, sharks start circling their prey, looking for vulnerable areas to attack. A shark feels the same insecurities and same wounds as the turtle, but to cover those feelings of fear, the shark turns instead to an "attack mode" to provide for himself or herself the same thing the turtle is seeking to achieve – protection. So, how about you? Do you tend to be "turtle-like" or "shark-like" when conflict arises? Understanding our own "protection devices" is a very important first step toward the goal of resolving conflict in our marriage.

Let me give you a few scenarios that might help you examine whether you have more shark or turtle tendencies. Turtles have very distinct ways of dealing with conflict, such as not speaking to their partner for hours, days, or weeks. They withhold their affection. They avoid the situation by spending more time at work or saturating their life with children or hobbies. They run home to mom or take their hurt to a friend who will listen to their story and offer sympathy, but rarely will they deal with the problem head-on. At times, they run to alcohol, drugs, pleasure seeking, or eating to sedate their pain. Whatever it is, they pull inside and say, "I'm not going to deal with this. This hurts too much, and I don't want to hurt anymore."

Sharks, on the other hand, tend to be verbal and want to attack. They use a variety of attack tactics, such as the following:

Sharks, on the other hand, tend to be verbal and want to attack.

The Mind-Reading Game – "You only did that because you felt guilty."

The Numbers Game – "I'm the only one trying in this relationship. I've done... and you never..."

The Intellectual Manipulation Game – "Why are you making such a big deal out of nothing?" They dismiss genuine emotional issues by intellectualizing them.

The Power-Intimidation Game – Angry outbursts, screaming, door slamming, "will teach you not to cross me again."

The Atomic Bomb Game – "All right, let's see how you feel when I divorce you!"

When there is danger or conflict, turtles pull their heads into their shells, and withdraw to a safe place.

The Labeling Humiliation Game – With arms crossed and sarcastic disdain, “You’re so stupid!” or “You’re pathetic!”

I’m sure it doesn’t take much of a reminder to see yourself in these turtle and shark scenarios; they are painful, unhealthy, and destructive attempts to resolve conflict. They don’t work! And you don’t *have* to be a shark or a turtle.

Summary

Up to now, I hope you’ve been able to identify with the struggles we all experience in the area of conflict in marriage. The axiom I want you to remember and have deeply fixed in your mind is this:

Your ability to work through conflict in a healthy manner WILL DETERMINE the degree of success and depth of intimacy in your marriage over the long haul.

Read this phrase over two or three times and think about it carefully. What I am saying is this: turtle and shark techniques will simply not work. Two turtles can peacefully coexist until the marriage dries up from the inside out. Or two sharks can so attack one another that the wounds become so deep and the bleeding and pain become so overwhelming that the love they once shared is eventually destroyed. Or, the combination of both behaviors can produce intermittent bouts of withdrawal and attack that drain the very life and intimacy out of even the best of marriages.

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So, where do we go from here? How can you, regardless of your personality, perspective, background, and inherent selfish tendencies, work together through conflict? Well, it’s not easy, and there’s no magic formula. But I believe God has a very clear plan to help us diffuse our conflict. The following acronym is a means that has proven to be very effective over the years for myself and for countless other couples. The acronym, DIFFUSE, will give you a memorable and step-by-step plan to work through the very specific and painful conflict you may presently be experiencing or may experience in the future.

How to DIFFUSE Conflict in Your Marriage

Define the problem.

“The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of the fool feeds on folly”
(Proverbs 15:14).

Defining the problem is the first step and must be done privately. Don’t do this with your spouse, do it alone. Ask yourself, “*What’s bothering me? How do I feel? When did this all begin?*” Writing in a journal is an effective way to answer these questions. Prayer is critical.

Ask God to show you what the problem is. This forces you to move past the symptoms and frustration and get to the heart of your conflict.

Defining the problem is the first step and must be done privately.

Whenever we have conflict in our home, I am convinced I am right the moment it starts. I'm not guessing. I'm not thinking. I'm not hoping. I'm 100 percent convinced, "she's got a problem." But when I go away and talk with God, I can't tell you the number of times that God has revealed my heart. "All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart" (Proverbs 21:2). This time alone also keeps you from the number one error in relational conflict resolution – talking too soon and attacking the person instead of the problem.

Initiate a time to talk.

Jesus said, "If you are offering your gift before the altar and there remember that you brother has something against you, *stop right where you are*, take your offering, lay it aside and go make it right with that person and then return to worship" (Matthew 5:23-24 paraphrase). God wants reconciliation in human relationships to take precedence over worship because you can't really worship God until things are right with others. You need to initiate a time to talk.

God wants reconciliation in human relationships to take precedence over worship.

If you're a shark, once you get it clear in your mind, you might want to walk in and say, "Okay, I've got it clear in my mind. Let's sit down and do it right now." But that may not be the best time for your wife or your husband. Initiate a time to talk that is the *right time* and the *right place*. If kids are running around while you're having this deep talk, it does not work. A ball game on TV while you're having this deep talk does not work. Make it good for both of you. Don't be pushy, but don't procrastinate. Your mate may need some time to define the problem too. Set a time to talk within 24 to 48 hours of the conflict.

Focus on the perceived problem, not on the person.

Once you throw bombs, withdraw, or wound one another, you've offended your mate, and even though you may eventually kiss and make up, there will be wounds and scars. "An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel" (Proverbs 18:19). We would do well to memorize this verse.

So, how can we break the habit of attacking the person instead of the problem? To focus on the problem, try using "I feel" messages instead of "You ought, you should, you never" messages. Let me explain what I mean when I say use "*I feel*" messages. A common conflict in our early years was about me coming home late for dinner. I didn't call. I didn't

think. I simply got “caught-up” in my world and my stuff and arrived home after dinner was over. Often I was greeted at the door with, “You *ought* to be home on time, you’re *never* home on time, you *always* do this, and you *should*...”

Now let me ask you, does that sound like two adults talking to one another to solve a problem or like a parent talking to a child? My wife, out of frustration, anger, and hurt, attempted to solve our conflict the way a parent does with a child. When two adults have a parent/child conversation and you’re a turtle, you withdraw. If you’re a shark, you say, “You wanna fight? Okay, I’ll fight.” Needless to say, my late dinners were followed by my “shark attacks” and by Theresa’s “turtle withdrawals.”

Then Theresa learned the secret of “*I feel*” messages. “*I feel*” messages are: “*I feel hurt* when you don’t show up on time for dinner. *I feel like you don’t care* about us when you continually come home late for dinner. *I feel discouraged* when we, as a family, decided we would do ‘this,’ but then you spend the money on ‘that.’ *I feel confused* when, after our conversation last night, you went ahead and took our son to see that movie that I didn’t feel was appropriate.”

*For two years
Theresa and I kept
3x5 cards taped on
the refrigerator
that read, “I
feel...when you...”*

When you use an “*I feel*” message, the focus is on the problem, not the person. This re-focusing is critical. It changes the situation from a personal attack to a shared, heartfelt problem. For two years Theresa and I kept 3x5 cards taped on the refrigerator that read, “I feel...when you...” It transformed our communication and our relationship. I still remember the first night she used an “*I feel*” message when I missed dinner. I was all set for a good fight. Instead she calmly, lovingly told me how she felt and had dinner on the stove for me. I had no one to fight. I felt like a selfish, insensitive, uncaring husband. After all the conflicts, I finally realized I was wounding and hurting those I loved.

Feel their pain as though it were your own.

Our number one role as partners to our mates is to minister Christ to them. Our goal should be to help our mates become more like Christ and to love them. In order to do this, we have to feel what they’re feeling as though it were our own pain. Proverbs 17:17 says that “a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” This means a friend doesn’t just love when it’s good, when it’s convenient, when it’s pleasant.

There are times when we need to step out of the problem and the chaos and say, “My wife needs a brother in Christ. My husband needs a sister in Christ. I was born for this time of adversity.” This may be especially difficult for some of us men who may not naturally be very empathetic. Feeling our partner’s pain as though it is our own doesn’t mean we have to

understand it. It doesn't have to be logical to us or make sense to us. The important thing is that we identify and empathize with how she or he feels.

Things weren't right, and I could feel the distance growing between us.

A few weeks ago, we had a major blow-up at our house. By "major blow-up," I don't mean that we had an all-out scene. As I've mentioned, I am a refined shark and Theresa is a "not-as-recessive" turtle. We didn't scream hatred at each other or throw things against the wall. But our relationship was beginning to get "chilly." Things weren't right, and I could feel the distance growing between us. I kept asking Theresa about it, and finally, after promising that I wouldn't get mad or be defensive and would really try to understand, she filled me in. She listed about eight household repair jobs that I had promised to "get around to" in the last two and a half years but were still undone.

They were little things in my mind, like water gushing from beneath the dishwasher during the rinse cycle, or like that leak in my daughter's bedroom that threatened to float her away with the next heavy storm. (When it rained, water would seep onto her floor, and Theresa would have to pile on the towels, wringing them out when they got full.) As I listened, of course I realized she had a good case. And since I couldn't be defensive and I couldn't get mean, something amazing happened. *I felt what she felt.* She said, "Chip, when there's something wrong at church and you see a problem, it's addressed right away. I can sit next to you in a service and if something happens that you don't think honors God, you evaluate it in 30 seconds, and it doesn't happen again. You have such intensity there about what ought to be right, and yet in our home, it feels like these things don't matter."

Her words were like a hot knife slicing through butter as they pierced my heart. All of a sudden I climbed into her moccasins, walked a couple of miles, and said, "What a jerk I am!" I had rationalized that I was the spiritual leader of our home, the recreational director, and Mr. Relational. So what if the house has a "few little problems?" What's the big deal? Then it occurred to me! I'm not there most of the time, but our house is her world, day in and day out. Feeling her pain allowed me to see my own insensitivity.

Her words were like a hot knife slicing through butter as they pierced my heart.

The Scripture says, "The purposes of a man's heart (or woman's heart) are deep waters, but a man (or woman) of understanding draws them out" (Proverbs 20:5). You see, sometimes the key to resolving conflict has nothing to do with "who's right" or "who's wrong." Sometimes the greatest breakthroughs come when we "lay down our arms" long enough to really feel what our mate feels. It doesn't mean they're necessarily "right," but when we understand the "why" behind their feelings, it's amazing how it opens the door for love to flow and conflict to dissipate.

Uncover the root problem.

If you did an analysis of your most common arguments, you'd find that most conflicts are over symptoms. The big issues of your life are not really about spending 20 bucks here or 75 bucks there, or whether the toothpaste should be squeezed from the middle, or who does what jobs around the house. Those are symptoms. To really grow from conflict, you need to get beyond the symptoms. If you don't deal with the root problems, those symptoms will keep resurfacing in a myriad of issues. It's like just pulling the tops off of weeds without removing the roots; the weeds will keep springing up. There are at least four major issues that every couple has conflict over from time to time. I would like to suggest that behind each of these symptoms is a major marital root issue. Look at the chart below and see if you can identify these in your relationship.

To really grow from conflict, you need to get beyond the symptoms.

<u>SYMPTOM</u>	<u>ROOT CONFLICT IS ABOUT...</u>
<i>Money issues</i>	Values, priorities, power/control issues
<i>Sex issues</i>	Communication, unmet emotional needs, past history/ baggage
<i>In-law issues</i>	Loyalty, expectations
<i>Children & work issues</i>	Goals and/or roles

When couples argue over finances, it is likely that money is not the real problem. If your mate spends too much money or is spending money where you disagree, what is the real issue? It's your values, what's important to you. If they spent money for *this* instead of for *that*, what's the issue? Priorities. If they spend an amount of money that you feel should have been discussed first, what's the issue? Control. Who has it? How much? Where does it lie? Discuss control. Talk about your values and your priorities. Come to terms calmly concerning these core issues and your money conflict will disappear.

If you don't feel loved in other areas, it's difficult to feel good about sex.

If you are arguing about sex, often the root issue is the lack of open, loving communication. Anger and resentment haven't gotten to the surface and been resolved. If you don't feel loved in other areas, it's difficult to feel good about sex. There may be baggage from other relationships or abuse in the past. Many a man is frustrated because he's married to a wife who really loves him, but she doesn't like sex. A man may not be able to understand this. What he doesn't understand is that the rejection doesn't have to do with him; it has to do with her. Often she's been abused or had very negative relationships with sex or with men in general.

As you work on the root problem, you will find that there are some things in your marriage, such as sex, with which you may need to get help. Just put the white flag up and say, "I don't think God wants us to argue about sex for the next 20 years, and I don't think having sex once a month is very healthy. So let's go talk to someone and get some help." And to be candid, I am amazed at how prevalent this problem is for many Christian couples and how little it's talked about. As Theresa and I have done multiple marriage seminars over the years, we find great godly people who have deep, unresolved struggles here. There is help, and you will be surprised what God can do as you face this issue "head on" and get the help you need.

If you are arguing about in-laws, the root issue is whether your mate is putting his or her family ahead of you and your children. You are really arguing about *loyalty* and *expectations*. Depending on our backgrounds, this can be an ongoing wedge in our relationships. It's critical to sit down calmly and walk through where you're feeling pressure from family, and to set some clear boundaries. The question is, how can you honor your extended family's desires without caving in to their expectations that place unfair demands on your immediate family? But until we talk about the *real issues*, we'll be arguing about "where to spend Thanksgiving" and "how often we should visit the in-laws" until Jesus comes.

If you are arguing about in-laws, the root issue is about loyalty and expectations.

Finally, if you are arguing about work and the children, the real issues are likely your goals for your children and the goals for your family. How much do they need of you? How much do they need your partner? Who has what role? Who's to do what and why? How do you run your family? Talk about what your roles are in the marriage and what your goals are as a couple. This will help you resolve work hours, home responsibilities, and time around the table.

Set it right between you.

Forgiveness is a choice. It's where you start the reconstruction process.

This is the action step. This step has to do with resolving the "blame" issue. Too often we are in conflict mode. We're waiting for our mate to come and apologize (especially when it was mostly their fault). Instead, *own your responsibility*. If you've prayed about it and really got it straight and you own 15 percent of the problem and they own 85 percent of it, own your 15 percent without reminding them of their 85 percent. Confess it to God and then confess it to your mate. Confessing means not just saying, "I'm sorry," but also "*I was wrong*." Be specific. Ask for forgiveness. Look them right in the eye and say, "*Will you forgive me?*" And when they say "yes" in a way that is less contrite or wholehearted than you'd like, don't say, "You don't really mean it!" You don't know what they

mean. Right now, they may be wounded and hurt. You may have said, "I'm sorry," 39 times before, and he or she hasn't seen much change in the last 39 times. But when they say, "I forgive you," believe that they have made a willful choice to release you from their revenge. Maybe it will take them two days, two week, or two months to get their emotions to the point where they feel like they've forgiven you, but forgiveness is a choice. It's where you start the reconstruction process.

Then, pray together! If at all possible, do it out loud. Reach out and touch and hold hands; just a small movement that says you want to move back toward one another, that both of you are a part of this deal and you need God's help. Say, "God, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for what I've done to my spouse. Will you help us? Will you forgive us? Will you help us start fresh?"

Establish a specific action plan that addresses the issue discussed.

This last step of diffusing conflict may be the most important. So often we work through all the pain and all the emotion and get things temporarily resolved, but because we fail to devise a "follow-through" plan, we find ourselves arguing again about the same things three days later. God's Word tells us, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in the mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man (or woman) who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he (or she) has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25).

Each of you should write down, "I commit to...by..." For example, "I commit to go to counseling with you by the end of this month," or "I commit to talking about our day for 15 minutes three times next week." Whatever it is, get it in writing. Decide that there's going to be a change and then plan it into your lives and schedules.

Decide that there's going to be a change and then plan it into your lives and schedules.

Does all this sound like a lot of work? It is! Does it sound complicated? It's not! Sure, at first it will be mechanical and uncomfortable and even laborious, but as you practice D I F F U S E, you will replace dysfunctional, hurtful relational patterns with positive, encouraging relational patterns. Conflicts will be reduced, affection will increase, and love will cover a multitude of sins. Don't give up! Don't give in! Don't settle for a second rate relationship and merely co-exist. Run to God! Seek His Help! Open your heart to His work in you, and trust that as you do, He will work in your mate as well.

Life is hard. Conflict is normal. Relationships are what life is all about. You can have a great one. Go for it!



CHIP INGRAM'S

passion is helping Christians learn to live like Christians. As a pastor, author, coach and teacher for twenty-five years, Chip has helped people around the world discover God's Word and apply it to their lives. Today, he serves as senior pastor of Venture Christian Church in Los Gatos, California, and president of Living on the Edge – an international teaching and discipleship ministry. He is the author of eleven books, including *Overcoming Emotions That Destroy* and *Good to Great in God's Eyes*. Chip and his wife, Theresa, have four children and eight grandchildren.

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Making Peace at Home

A Practical Tool for Understanding and Resolving Conflict in Marriage

Conflict is inevitable in a fallen world, and marriages are no exception. Regardless of the depth of our commitment to each other, friction is absolutely unavoidable...but it doesn't have to tear us apart! Would you like to know HOW to diffuse potentially hurtful and frustrating conflicts before they start? Would you like to understand WHY our differences can divide us and WHAT causes us to react to each other the way we do? This booklet will give you practical tools for diffusing even the very deepest levels of conflict in the relationship that means the most to you.