

# How To Handle Marital Conflicts

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### Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

The last newsletter number 48 on "Warship Wars" generated far more responses than any of the previous ones. The hundreds of messages you have emailed to me from all over the world, have made me forcefully aware of the fact that we are an international church family facing similar problems.

In the next newsletter I will interact with some of your comments and also post the apology of Pastor Tom Hughes has emailed to me. We need to take a closer look at the whole issue of the new forms of contemporary worship being adopted by an increasing number of local congregations and being promoted by some of our church leaders as a new strategy for planting new churches.

Tomorrow morning, Wednesday June 28, my wife and I will be leaving for Toronto, Canada, to attend the General Conference Session. We will be back on Sunday, July 9. We look forward to meet many of our fellow believers from all over the world. If you plan to attend the GC, you can easily find us at the Exhibition Center. Our Booths numbers are 1707 and 1709. Be sure to stop by and visit us.

Because of time pressure, this time I will dispense of the general announcements, and proceed immediately with our Bible Study on "How to Handle Marital Conflicts". This is an important topic that affects every married couple, because in a relationship as intimate as marriage, some conflicts are inevitable. The more intimate the marriage relationship is, the more likely it is for conflicting views and desires to surface. No two normal intelligent persons want the same things all the time or see issues in exactly the same way. The fact that each of us is a unique person will lead to conflicts in relationships.

We have to be realistic and recognize that disagreements are part of marriage. Two strong, independent personalities will not flow together without causing some turbulence. This is true for both Christian and non-Christian couples, whether educated or uneducated.

Marital conflicts assume different forms. Occasionally, they deteriorate into an all-out war. Most often, however, they are skirmishes fought in subtle ways: verbal abuse, stoic silence, public criticism, sarcastic remarks, intimidation, demeaning remarks, indifference. Such common tactics are wrong because they tend to weaken a marriage.

Conflict in marriage is not necessarily bad or sinful. The determinative factor is how the conflict is handled. If a conflict is used constructively to enhance communication and deepen understanding, then it can strengthen and solidify a marriage covenant.

When a married couple tells me that they have never had an argument or conflict during their 30 or 40 years of marriage, I assume that one of two things must be true of them: (1) they are not telling the truth, (2) their relationship must be rather superficial and boring.

The Bible warns us against pretending that everything is well when in reality there are problems in our lives or in our society. Jeremiah and Ezekiel sternly condemn those false prophets who misled the people into believing that all was well with their lives when in reality, they were living in open opposition to the will of God: "They have healed the

wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace" (Jer 6:14; cf. 8:11; Ez 13:10-11, 14-16).

God is against a phony acceptance of the status quo because healing can only take place when wrongs are acknowledged, forgiven, and truth comes to light. This applies to conflict in marriage as well. Marital relationships can be healed and strengthened not by burying all the differences, but by facing and resolving them.

Maintaining a phony peace at any price when there is no peace only serves to weaken the marriage covenant. The Christian couple committed to live out their marriage covenant must be prepared to seek divine grace and wisdom to honestly face and resolve their differences. To the same degree a couple succeeds in developing the ability to openly discuss and resolve their differences, they will deepen their marital commitment and intimacy.

When I prepared this essay, I divided it into two parts. In the first part, I examine nine major causes of marital conflicts, namely (1) personality differences, (2) intellectual differences, (3) spiritual differences, (4) vocational tensions, (5) role conflicts, (6) family crises, (7) in-law difficulties, (8) sexual adjustments, and (9) the use of money. In the second part, I consider seven basic rules on how to handle conflicts in marriage constructively: (1) be committed to preserve your marriage covenant, (2) be honest and fair in handling the conflict, (3) keep your anger under control, (4) choose an appropriate time to discuss a problem, (5) stick to the issue at hand, (6) listen carefully and speak tactfully, and (7) be willing to forgive and to forget. The ultimate aim of this chapter is to help a Christian couple turn conflicts into opportunities to build a stronger marriage covenant.

Out of consideration to the many subscribers who have urged me to shorten my newsletters, I am posting only the second part of this essay. Feel free to contact me if you wish to receive the unabridged version.

## UPCOMING SEMINARS & EXHIBITS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of my upcoming BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES EXHIBITS and weekend SEMINARS on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Lifestyle. Each seminar consists of three presentations: Friday evening at 7:30 p. m., Sabbath morning at 11:00 a. m., and Sabbath afternoon at 5:00 p. m. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area.

### **July 14-15: Seminar At The Altamonte Springs SDA Church In Orlando, Florida**

**Address:** 455 Maitland Avenue, Altamonte Springs, Florida 32701

For information call: Pastor Ron Bentzinger at (407) 767-7522

or (407) 889-2713

### **July 23 To August 1: Bible Conference In Bermuda**

**Address:** 41 King Street, Hamilton HM 19, Bermuda

For information call: President Carlyle C. Simmons

at (441) 292-4110 or (441) 238-0792

### **August 2-5: Exhibit At The Adventist-Laymen's Services & Industries Convention**

**Address:** Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**EXHIBIT BOOTH:** To find our booth look for a 12' long banner saying: **BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES Presents . . .** The banner has my picture and that of the 15 books I have authored. At the convention all my books, cassettes, and videos will be made available at a substantially discounted price. I will be on hand to autograph your copies.

### **August 18-19: Seminar At The Height SDA Church In Albuquerque, New Mexico**

**Address:** 4920 Wyoming N E, Albuquerque, NM 87191

For information call: Pastor Wayne Gayton at (505) 298-5811

or (505)271-5850

### **August 25-26: Seminar At The Hinsdale Fil-Am SDA Church**

**Address:** 9 East 59th Street, Hinsdale, Illinois 60521

For information call: Pastor Daniel Botabara (630) 515-0939

or (630) 655-8786

## **SPECIAL OFFER ON *THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC***

Several of you have emailed me messages inquiring how long will the special offer last on the new book ***The Christian and Rock Music***. To make it possible for many people to benefit from this timely study, we decided to extend indefinitely the following special offer:

**1 copy US\$20.00, postage paid.**

**2 copies US\$30.00, postage paid.**

**26 copies (one complete case) US\$170.00, postage paid. (Only \$6.50 a copy)**

Thank you for informing your church members that your church can order a case **containing 26 copies of this timely book for only \$170.00, that is, only US\$6.50 per copy (instead of the regular price of \$20.00), mailing expenses included, even for overseas shipments.**

To order copies of ***The Christian and Rock Music*** for yourself or your church, feel free to call us at (616) 471-2915 or email us your request with your credit card information at <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net>. We guarantee to process your order on the same day we receive it.

May I express our heartfelt appreciation to all of you who have been promoting this timely new book. As a result of your efforts the first printing is almost sold out and a large reprint will be delivered in few days.

## **HOW TO HANDLE MARITAL CONFLICTS**

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D., Prof. of Theology, Andrews University**

Some conflicts are inevitable in every marriage because no two persons have exactly the same personalities, attitudes, and values. Some of the differences do not come to light until the couple has been married for some time. When the differences appear, some conflicts are bound to arise.

There is nothing wrong with conflicts, provided they serve a constructive purpose by improving communication and strengthening marital relationships. Sometimes conflicts can bring smoldering resentments to surface, which, left unresolved, can destroy a marriage or at least cost the psychic health of one or both partners.

Conflicts, per se, are not necessarily bad or sinful. It is the way conflicts are handled that determines their impact on the marriage relationship. Conflicts may destroy a marriage, but they may also strengthen it. A successful Christian marriage is not necessarily one in which there are no conflicts, but rather one in which the partners have learned to resolve their differences openly, honestly, and constructively.

Unfortunately, in many instances, conflicts are detrimental to the marriage relationship because they become a way to attack, wound, and diminish the other partner. When a couple engages in name-calling, ridiculing, and belittling each other, the result will only widen the gap between them. To prevent conflicts from deteriorating into an all-out war, it is important to observe the seven basic rules outlined below. These rules, if obeyed, will enable a Christian couple to handle their conflicts constructively, turning them into opportunities for removing obstacles to a stronger marriage.

### **1. Be Committed to Preserve Your Marriage Covenant**

The first rule in handling marital conflicts successfully is to be totally committed to preserving your marriage covenant. It is only within the context of a loving and irrevocable commitment that marital conflicts can be successfully resolved. When couples are determined not to let anything or anyone put asunder the marital unions established by God (Matt 19:6), they can risk being honest and open in discussing their differences.

If we are deeply committed to preserving our marriage covenants, we will not allow any issue to divide us. We will not permit any argument to degenerate into a hostile confrontation. We will not waste our time quarreling over things we cannot change.

There are many differences in marriage that by God's grace can be overcome, but there are also inherited or acquired characteristics which we cannot change. There is no point in my wife's criticizing me for my baldness or for my heavy Italian accent. Similarly, there is no point for my criticizing my wife for the shape of her nose or for the extra pounds she has gained since we got married almost thirty years ago. Being committed to preserving our marriage covenant means to ask God to make us willing to accept what we cannot change, to give us courage to change what needs to be changed, and to give us wisdom to know the difference.

A total commitment is only possible by divine grace. It is God that gives us the power to hold fast to our commitments. God is interested in our marriages. He not only joins our lives together, but He is helping us stay together when conflicts arise. He wants us to enjoy happy, harmonious marriage relationships. He will move heaven and earth, if necessary, to resolve any conflicts that may arise in our relationships. But He needs our cooperation.

We must take God as our partner into our marriage relationships by keeping the fire ever burning on the altar of our daily worship. We must begin and close each day praying together, renewing our commitment to God and to each other. We must ask God daily for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to be truthful, kind, patient and understanding toward each other. The couple that prays together stays together. As our

love for God increases, our love for one another will grow stronger and our capacity to resolve conflicts will become greater.

## **2. Be Honest and Fair in Handling the Conflict**

A second important rule in handling marital conflicts is to be honest and fair. Couples who are committed to preserving their marriage covenants will not engage in “dirty fighting,” hitting below the belt, or lying to win the argument. Paul alludes to this principle in Ephesians 4:25 where he says: “Therefore, putting away falsehood, let everyone speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.” The verses that follow contain other significant principles to be considered. The particular tense used in Greek for “putting away falsehood” (aorist participle) conveys the idea of something already done at a specific point in time. Thus, a literal translation would read: “Having put away falsehood, let everyone speak truthfully with his neighbor.”

Applied to a marriage relation, this text challenges husbands and wives who have laid aside falsehood from their lives and relationships to speak truthfully to one another when conflicts arise. It is essential for a couple to commit themselves to an honest relationship so that when conflicts develop, they will not fall into the trap of lying to each other just to win the argument. From the very beginning of their relationship, a couple should commit themselves to being totally honest with each other. They need to say: “Let us not try to kid one another by playing games. I promise to be honest with you and I want you to be honest with me. If a conflict occurs, let us not resort to unfair practices to win.”

The object of conflict should not be not to find fault or to assess blame but to resolve problems. Marriage is not a competitive sport but a cooperative endeavor. When a problem occurs, the goal should not be to determine who is right and who is wrong, but to find a satisfactory solution. “The attitude of partners,” as Stephen Grunlan puts it, “should not be a win/lose approach; that is, every solution involving a winner and a loser. Rather, the attitude of partners should be a win/win approach. The couple faces the problem together and when a solution is found, they both win.”

When the concern of spouses is for each to win the argument, ultimately, they both become losers: first, because they will often resort to unfair tactics to win, and second, because the outcome of the conflict will be a weaker relationship where feelings of resentment and bitterness remain and eventually lead to new confrontations. Thus, it is most important for a couple to handle conflicts with honesty and fairness, seeking the best solution to a problem, regardless of whose idea it is.

## **3. Keep Your Anger Under Control**

Besides being committed to honesty and fairness in handling conflicts in marriage, the third rule is to keep your anger under control. Paul alludes to this principle in Ephesians 4:26 where he says: “Be angry but do not sin.” We noticed that in the preceding verse Paul exhorts us to speak truthfully to one another. This does not mean that a Christian should never feel or express anger. Rather it means that truthful persons will not allow their anger to become undisciplined and uncontrolled.

Something essential would be missing in a marital partner who is unable to feel or express anger. Obviously, there must be a right kind of anger. There are situations where a partner will be aroused to the point of indignation by overt wrongs committed by the other partner. A marriage covenant would lose its meaning if, for example, spouses would not become angry at the infidelity of their partners. This verse tells us that there is a place in the Christian life for righteous indignation. God says: “I permit you to be angry, but don’t let your anger lead you to sin.”

We all know that anger becomes sinful when is expressed through outbursts of temper, profane or insulting language, or physical violence. Uncontrolled anger can become a deadly weapon which must be banished from the Christian life. But the anger

which is disciplined, selfless, and pure, can be a great moral force in the world. This world would have lost much without the righteous indignation of Jesus against human hypocrisy (Mark 3:5; John 2:13-17).

As sinful creatures, we are all subject to feelings of pride, selfishness, fatigue, and anxiety which sometimes break out in uncontrolled outbursts of anger and irritation. This ugly side of our nature is revealed especially in marriage, the place where we can safely blow off our steam and release our frustrations. At home, we can safely unload our temper, anger, and tensions. Our angry outbursts, offensive remarks, and sharp retort wound our partners who may also reveal their ugly nature by retaliating with similar outbursts of rancor.

Angry words, once spoken even unintentionally, are deadly weapons that can wound and crush our mates permanently. Just as God's word does not return empty but accomplishes its purpose (Is 55:11), so our words will accomplish their purpose, even when we wish that they would not. A man who in a moment of anger tells his wife, "Let's face it, I do not feel like loving you anymore," will inflict upon her a permanent wound. So does the cutting remark, "No wonder you act so irresponsibly. Your father died in a mental hospital." Such cutting words cannot be easily forgotten. Your mate may later say, "I forgive you," but deep inside, the hurt caused by those words may never be healed. Angry words can gradually break that inner covenant bond that holds marriages together. It is therefore, essential to learn by divine grace to keep our anger under control.

If a conflict gets out of control in our marriage, the only way to still the storm is for the more spiritually mature partner to break the cycle of mutual attack by refusing to retaliate for the hurt received. This is the only way to bring to an end a marital fight.

#### **4. Choose an Appropriate Time to Discuss a Problem**

This leads us to consider a fourth rule which is to choose an appropriate time to discuss a problem. The wise man Solomon notes that there is "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak . . . a time for war, and a time for peace" (Eccl 3:7-8). This is certainly true of marital conflicts. Marriage counselors agree that timing is critical to constructive resolution of conflicts. George Gach and Peder Wyden write: "Far too many fights become needlessly aggravated because the complaint opens fire when his partner really is in an inappropriate frame of mind or is trying to dash off to work or trying to concentrate on some long-delayed chore that he has finally buckled down to. Indeed there are times when failure to delay—or to advance—the timing of a fight can have cataclysmic consequences."

There may be times when an issue has to be resolved immediately. In most cases, however, conflicts develop over a period of time and can be temporarily put off until an appropriate time. This is the procedure followed in most organizations, and it should be followed in marriage.

A basic rule to remember regarding the timing for discussing problems is to avoid raising them just before anything that will not provide adequate time to satisfactorily deal with them. For example, the time just before a meal, just before going to bed, just before making love, just before going to work, or just before going to church, is inappropriate for dealing with unpleasant disagreements.

The best time to discuss sensitive issues or serious differences is when both husband and wife are well rested, wide awake and feeling at ease. At such favorable times one can be more rational, considerate, and accommodating. A wise husband or wife who knows the importance of proper timing for discussing serious and disagreeable things will say, "I don't think this is the best time to discuss this matter. Why don't we deal with it later on when the children are in bed or after we have rested!" Having said this, we must set a time and keep the appointment.

Another important rule regarding timing is not to prolong the discussion unduly. Anger, conflicts, and negative feelings must be resolved as soon as possible because the longer we postpone mending a conflict, the more difficult it will be to resolve it later. Paul emphasizes this important rule in Ephesians 4:26-27, saying: "Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." This means that we must never go to sleep with bitter feelings or thoughts against our partners. If there has been a conflict during the day or in the evening, we must make peace and banish any lingering negative feelings before we go to sleep. The longer we allow bitter feelings to flourish, the more difficult it will be to eradicate them later.

## **5. Stick to the Issue at Hand**

A fifth important rule to remember in handling marital conflicts is to stick to the issue at hand. When a couple chooses an appropriate time to discuss a certain problem (rule four), they should use that time to address that particular issue and not to bring up all their past problems.

Stephen Grunlan relates the story of a woman who complained to her friend that her husband became historical every time they had an argument. "Her friend corrected her by saying, 'You mean he becomes hysterical.' 'No,' replied the woman, 'I mean historical. Whenever we have an argument, he brings up every related problem since we have been married.'"

Marriage counselors emphasize the importance of sticking to the issue at hand. Dragging past grievances into the matter under discussion will hinder the resolution of the immediate conflict. It may also open old wounds and thus aggravate the situation.

Sticking to the issue also involves avoiding sweeping generalization and accusation. The following argument will serve to illustrate this point:

Husband: You left the lawn mower out in the backyard yesterday and now the motor is soaked from last night's rain. When will you ever learn to put things away in the proper place.

Wife: Look who is talking. You leave your shoes all over the house, and I have to pick them up and put them away all the time.

In this argument, the lawn mower is generalized and used as a pretext to launch a sweeping accusation. The wife defends herself by launching a counterattack totally unrelated to the issue involved. The end result is that a minor incident can turn into a hostile confrontation. How different the outcome would have been if the husband had stuck to the original issue and the wife had been willing to accept responsibility. Imagine the conversation going something like this:

Husband: Honey, did you know that you left the lawn mower out in the backyard yesterday, and the motor got soaked with rain last night?

Wife: Oh no! I completely forgot to bring in the lawn mower. I'm sorry. Will you be able to get the motor started now?

Husband: I think so, but I will have to pull out the spark plug and dry it. I hope you won't leave the lawn mower out again.

Wife: No, I'll be sure to bring it in next time. I'm sorry for causing you extra work.  
Husband: No problem. Just remember it next time.

This conversation brings a happy ending to the incident of the lawn mower, leaving the question of the shoes for another discussion. The husband disciplines himself by sticking to the issue of the lawn mower while the wife acknowledges her responsibility. An apology and forgiveness settles the issue. Minor incidents such as this can be easily



resolved when partners stick to the issue and acknowledge responsibility. Failure to do so can cause minor problems to balloon into serious altercations.

## **6. Listen Carefully and Speak Tactfully**

Closely related to a responsible attitude of sticking to the issue at hand (rule five) is rule six: listen carefully to the words of your mate and speak tactfully. Conflicts in marriage should serve to improve communication by helping partners know better how each feels and thinks about an issue.

Communication presupposes listening. Learning to listen carefully to the words of a mate is essential in handling conflicts. Yet, this rule of effective listening is most difficult to implement because in a conflict situation when a person is talking, the other is not listening but is thinking about how to respond. The louder our voices and the uglier our words, the less our spouses will listen and the poorer will be our communication.

It is important to listen carefully to understand what the real issue is. For example, a husband may complain over the fact that his wife bought a new vacuum cleaner rather than having the old one repaired. In reality, what he may be complaining about is the fact that his wife did not consult him. He may fear that his wife does not think that he is responsible for the home. Or a wife may complain that her husband spends little time with her when what she really means is that her husband does not seem to care enough for her.

When a couple argues and fights, they need to make sure that they understand what they are really fighting about. This is possible only by learning to listen carefully to each other and to ask questions that may help uncover those hidden feelings which are the cause of the conflict.

Understanding the issue through careful listening and questioning is the first important step. Equally important is the next step of speaking tactfully and graciously. Paul expresses this principle in Ephesians 4:29, saying: "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear."

A Christian is called upon to refrain from harsh, evil speaking and to engage instead in edifying speech which imparts grace and encouragement to others. This requires learning to be courteous and tactful in our speaking. Tact involves being sincere and open while at the same time showing respect for the other person's feelings, and being careful not to hurt them unnecessarily. Christ is our perfect example of tactfulness and courtesy even toward His persecutors. As His followers we should manifest the same attitude, especially toward our family members.

True courtesy and tactfulness in speech is not learned merely by practicing a few rules of etiquette, but through a renewal of the heart. It is only when the heart has been touched by the love of Christ that people will feel motivated to listen carefully and to speak tactfully to all, especially to their marital partners.

## **7. Be Willing to Forgive and to Forget**

The success of the preceding six rules in resolving marital conflicts is largely dependent upon the seventh rule which is to be willing to forgive and to forget the wrongs of your mate. Ideally, marital conflicts should always be handled in a controlled and rational way, leading to greater communication between mates. Realistically, however, in every marriage there are times when conflicts become uncontrolled and irrational. There are situations, when because of fatigue, pride, selfishness, anxiety, the ugly side of our nature breaks out in angry outbursts, cutting remarks, abusive language, or irrational accusations. Such behavior awakens the equally ugly side in our mates who may retaliate similarly with angry and abusive language.

The only way to bring a conflict which has gotten out of control to a satisfactory end, is for one partner to break the retaliation cycle by forgiving the other partner for the hurt received. In Christian marriages forgiveness must be patterned after the forgiveness Christ offers us. He forgives us in spite of the pain and sorrow we have caused Him. On the cross, Christ forgave those who crucified Him, saying: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). When we forgive, we acknowledge that we have suffered a real wrong which by God's grace we choose to forget.

In a covenant marriage, we recognize the sin that our mates have committed against us. We do not explain away the sinful behavior of our mate by saying, "He did not mean what he said," or "Probably I deserve what he did to me," or "I do not feel really hurt by what he did to me." Rather, we realistically recognize that we have suffered wrong, but we do not allow such wrongs to weaken our mutual commitment. Why? First, because we recognize that we are sinful beings who sometimes hurt each other terribly. We violate the deepest trust of our mates. We trample upon their unconditional love. Second, because we realize that since God can forgive our mates, so can we.

Forgiveness in a marriage covenant must be as unconditional as is Christ's forgiveness to us. In Ephesians 4:32, Paul writes: "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." God forgave us in Christ, not after we promised to reform and obey, but "while we were yet sinners" (Rom 5:8). In the same way, we must forgive our mates not only if they promise never to wrong us again, but simply because God in Christ has forgiven us.

This means that when we forgive, we must be willing to forget the wrong we have suffered. The Scripture reassures us that God's forgiveness involves forgetting our sinful actions: "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, I will not remember your sins" (Is 43:25). "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:17; cf. Jer 31:34; 2 Cor 5:17-19).

Forgiveness in a marriage covenant involves forgetting the wrongs a mate has committed and choosing not to recount them later. If we continue to remember and to bring up past grievances every time a conflict breaks out, then we have not truly forgiven our mate because genuine forgiveness means blotting out past wrongs from memory (Acts 3:19). Such a forgiveness is possible when we personally have experienced the blessing of God's forgiveness in our lives. When the love of Christ has flooded our hearts, we will have the motivating power to forgive.

Genuine forgiveness makes us free to love, to trust, and to grow with our mates. It enables us to break the cycle of retaliatory attacks. If we have been wounded by the words or actions of our mates, we refuse to retaliate by returning words or actions in kindness. Such an attitude can calm tensions and create a pleasant atmosphere conducive to a rational discussion of the problem.

A couple willing to forgive each other will also help each other to repent of wrong doings. In the Christian life, we are led to repentance by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit which reveals to us our sinfulness and God's forgiving grace. When we experience God's forgiving grace in our lives, we feel sorry for our past sins, and we sincerely want to walk in newness of life. The same is true in the marital relationship. If my wife forgives me, I will feel sorry for my wrong doings, and I will seek not to betray her love and trust again. Forgiveness gives us a chance to begin again and develop a stronger relationship because it is based on the power of forgiving love which can conquer conflicts and reconcile us to God and to one another.

## **CONCLUSION**

Some conflicts are inevitable in every marriage because no two persons have exactly the same personality, attitude, and values. A successful Christian marriage is not necessarily one in which there are no conflicts, but rather one in which partners have learned to handle their conflicts constructively, turning them into opportunities for improving

communication and building a stronger marriage covenant. We have found that seven basic rules can help in turning conflicts into constructive opportunities.

First, we must be totally committed to preserving our marriage covenant. It is only within the context of a loving and steadfast commitment that marital conflicts can be successfully resolved.

Second, we must be honest and fair in handling marital conflicts, avoid hitting below the belt or lying to win the argument. Our concern should be to find the best solution to the problem, irrespective of who wins or loses.

Third, we must learn to keep our anger under control, avoiding outbursts of anger, insulting language, and cutting remarks. If the conflict gets out of control, the more spiritually mature partner will seek to still the storm by refusing to retaliate for the hurt received.

Fourth, we must choose an appropriate time to discuss a problem, avoiding raising issues just before anything that would not provide adequate time to deal with them satisfactorily.

Fifth, we must learn to stick to the issue at hand, and not use the occasion to bring up past grievances. This includes avoiding sweeping generalizations and accusations.

Sixth, we must learn to listen carefully to the words of our mates and to speak tactfully. Such an approach will make it possible to uncover hidden feelings which may be the cause of the conflict.

Seventh, we must be willing to forgive and to forget the wrongs of our mates, not because we are morally upright, but because we have experienced God's forgiving grace in our lives. By learning to forgive and to forget, we become free to love, to trust, and to grow into a stronger covenant relationship.

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