

HOW TO RESTORE HARMONY IN YOUR HOME

Mark 3:25

We're in a series on strengthening your family. Today we're looking at How to Restore Harmony in Your Home.

In the first message of this series, I said families are fragile. Conflict can hurt families, damage families, and destroy families. In **Mark 3:25 (NIV)**, we read "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand." In other words, as the Living Bible renders it: *"A home filled with strife and division destroys itself."*

I think it ought to be a mandatory law before anybody got married that they are taught conflict management. Conflict is inevitable. Every person is unique. God made us all unique. We have different desires, tastes, interests, talents, abilities, temperament. Therefore, we're going to clash because we're different. All of us look at life differently.

Today we want to look at three things:

The reason for conflict

The reactions to conflict

The resolution to conflict

1. The Reason for Conflict.

What causes conflict? The Bible is very blunt. It says there is one reason for it. Look at **James 4:1,2**: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but you don't get it." That is to say -- the cause of conflict is competing desires. I want what I want; you want what you want.

At home, my wife wants to watch TFC. I want to watch the news. My children want to watch the Disney Channel. I want to watch the NBA. There is conflict there. Guess who wins?

We're all different, and as we go along in marriage and in living family life, conflict becomes inevitable.

When you got married, you stood in front of an altar or justice of the peace and you had many expectations on that wedding day. Most of them will never be fulfilled. They were unrealistic. Somebody said that marriage goes through three stages: the happy honeymoon, the party's over, let's make a deal. A wife says to her husband: "Do you want dinner?" The husband replies, "Sure, what are my choices?" The wife says, "Yes and no". Conflict is inevitable.

2. The Reactions to Conflict.

How do you normally react to conflict? Usually in one of five ways:

- a. **My way** - my way says, "I win." I assert my will until you give in. I'm totally right; you're totally wrong; and my way is the only way. You fight, and you just keep going till you win.
- b. **No way** - "no way" says, "I withdraw; I back away from the conflict. I ignore the problem at all costs." So nothing is ever resolved because I just keep walking away from conflict.
- c. **Your way** — and "your way" is when I give in and roll over and play dead. I want your approval, so I pretend I'm a door mat. I always give in to your wishes. It's always "your way." It's a very peaceful way to live but also a very frustrating way, and one that can produce a dandy stomach ulcer!
- d. **Half-way** - and that is where you compromise. I give in a little; you give in a little. You win some, you lose some. And that's better than the first three. But there's an even better way -
- e. **Our way** - when we work out mutual goals together. I'm concerned not only about solving the problem; I care about the relationship, and I care about you. So, I want us to have a mutually satisfactory resolution to this conflict because you are important to me, and our relationship is important.

3. **The Resolution to Conflict.**

Let us turn to the Bible and see eight steps on how to resolve conflict successfully.

a. **Become a Christian.** That's the starting point. Commit your life to Christ. You can't have peace with other people until you first have peace with God. The Bible says that if I have not committed my life to Christ, I am at war with God. I'm doing my own thing. And if I'm in conflict with God vertically, it spills over horizontally. Many family problems would be solved if members of the family would just kneel at the foot of the Cross and make Christ Lord of all. Then there would be harmony and unity.

Look at **Ephesians 2:16 (CSB), "He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death."**

What a great verse! When Christ's Spirit is living in me and Christ's Spirit is living in you, then hostility would cease. Because there's only one Spirit between us.

Many of you could say, "Before I became a Christian, I had no motivation at all to resolve conflict. If there was a conflict, I'd simply say, 'That's your problem.' But now that I have the Holy Spirit in my life, He not only gives me the desire to make things right when there's a strained relationship, but He gives me the power to make things right."

b. **Talk to God about the conflict.** Before you talk to the person you're upset with, talk to God about the conflict. Pray about it, and admit it to Him, and you may end up solving it right there.

James 4:2 is a very revealing verse. See what it says, **"...you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God."** Ask God!

You see, many of the conflicts we have in life occur when we expect other people to meet needs that God expects Himself to meet.

Many a time we look to other people for help, and all the time God is saying, “Why don’t you ask Me?”

I’ve heard people say, “If only I could get married, all my needs would be met.” But folks, no matter how wonderful that person would be, he or she could never meet all your needs. God designed you in such a way that He wants to meet your deepest needs. Look to God to meet your basic needs.

c. **Analyze the Problem**, and ask yourself, “How much of this is my fault?” Before you go out accusing and blaming and attacking, Jesus says, “Check your own score.” Am I the problem? Am I the cause of it? Is there a blind spot in my life?

Look at **Matthew 7:3: “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”**

When you’re in conflict, before you start getting the sawdust out of your wife’s eye, get the telephone pole out of your eye! Ask, “Am I being demanding? Am I being unrealistic? Am I oversensitive, insensitive, or impatient?”

I read the story of a man who had a big blow up with his wife because she always had Dial soap in the shower, and he liked change. He didn’t like the same smell all the time! Why not get Safeguard and Lifebuoy and Irish Spring once in a while? And he made a big fuss. But fortunately, he saw how foolish he was being, and they made up. But the next Christmas he opened one of his presents from his wife, and there were 27 different bars of soap! Now that was a wife who cares!

Look at yourself and say, “Am I the problem?” Now, there’s no such thing as a one-person- problem. It is always a family problem; it’s our problem. **1 John 1:8** says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Stop shifting the blame. Just be honest. We all do dumb things. So, analyze the problem.

After you've done these first three things: you've committed your life to Christ, you've talked to God about the problem, you've analyzed it, then...

d. **Schedule a peace conference**. Many of us don’t want to do this because we’ll be exposed, we don’t know how to handle the truth, we feel awkward, we don’t want to confront. But, it has to be done. Sit down and face the issues. Tackle the problem head on. Conflict is seldom resolved accidentally. It is resolved deliberately. Don’t be the artful dodger! The only way to resolve conflict is to face it. You’ve got to talk it out.

Jesus talked about going to church and the priority of getting things right with other people over worship. He says, if you go to church and **"If you remember your brother has something against you leave your gift in front of the altar and go make peace with your brother. Then come back and offer your gift to God."** (Matt. 5:23-24 GNT) Jesus says don't ignore conflict. If you've got a problem and you're coming to church, you get ready to give the offering and you remember the problem, Jesus says go get it right. Notice it does say *"Leave your gift at the altar."* You cannot worship effectively with unresolved conflict.

Have you ever had a fight in the car on the way to church? Some of our biggest fights have been in the car on the way to church.

Peter says in the book of **1 Peter 3:7**, **"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will**

hinder your prayers." If you're not in harmony with your wife, it's hindering your prayers. If you're wondering why your prayers are not being answered, the first thing to check is your relationship with your wife.

God wants you to treat them first with respect before he listens to you. God is the God of the weak and the oppressed, Amen?

e. **Establish Ground Rules** - prior to the confrontation!

In the 90's, the Soviet Union leaders heeded the call of the Western Nations especially the US to break the stranglehold of communism. Have we therefore resolved all our conflict with the Russians? No way. We are still in major disagreement over our political and economic philosophies. Those differences may be irreconcilable. But even though we disagree with them, we can agree that there are certain ground rules that we would observe to prevent the outbreak of World War III. Like limiting the production of nuclear weapons and refraining from using them in case of war.

Now ground rules need to be signed in every family so that when we argue, we can have major differences, but there are certain deadly weapons that are out of bounds, like flying plates and glasses, and we will not use them because they provoke to anger and resentment.

Let me give you seven rules for fighting fair in marriage. They all start with "C" so you can call them "the Seven C's"! Determine in your heart that from this day forward, these are all out of bounds.

(1) **Never compare**. Don't say, "Why can't you be like so and so?"; or, "You're just like your father or mother"; or, "I wish you could make an apple pie like my mother." It's unfair to compare.

(2) **Never condemn**. Don't use phrases like "You always...", "You never...", "You ought to...", "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" You see,

when you lay on the guilt, there will always be an angry response, always. Only God has the right to judge.

(3) **Never command.** Don't try to end an argument by force.

"I demand that you do what I say, or else..." Don't try to be a parent to your spouse.

(4) **Never challenge.** Don't make threats like "Just try that and see what happens." Don't fling down the gauntlet or you may be very startled by a belligerent response! Never threaten withdrawal of sex or money, and never threaten divorce. Rule those out as deadly weapons in your marriage.

(5) **Never condescend.** Never treat people as less than they really are. Don't belittle your spouse. Don't put them down, or ridicule them, or deliberately hurt their feelings. And above all, don't play psychologist! "Now I know why you said that." "Oh, really!" "Yes, you said that because..." Folks, most of us have a difficult enough time figuring out our own motives! Don't prejudge motives.

(6) **Never contradict.** Don't interrupt your spouse in the middle of a sentence. We're so inclined to rush in, say things back, and seek to justify our own position. Often, we don't even listen; we're just thinking of what we're going to say back! Don't cut people off. Wait your turn to speak when you're in a conflict. Treat each other with consideration.

(7) **Never confuse.** Don't bring up unrelated issues in the middle of an argument! Often, we do this intentionally to sidetrack people, and some of us are very good at this, especially when we see that we're getting killed! Stick with the issue.

Let me summarize by saying: Attack the issue, not each other. I like **Proverbs 11:29 (GNT) which says, "Those who bring trouble on their families will have nothing at the end."** That is to say, it is foolish to intentionally cause

anger or resentment in your home. It's plain dumb, but we do it so often when we're angry.

f. **Switch your Focus.** Move the focus away from yourself to the other person. Graduate from selfishness to unselfishness. **Philippians 2:4,5** says, **"Each of you should look out not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."** If we would only obey these verses we would have very little conflict in our homes.

What was Christ's attitude? It was an attitude of not looking after Number One but looking out for other people. Notice that word "look." In the Greek, it is the verb "skopeo" from which we get our word telescope, or microscope, or the scope on a rifle. It means to "look intently," to pay attention to the needs of the person you're in conflict with.

So you have to ask -- what are my spouse's needs right now? What can I do to meet those needs? When we're angry, all we can see are our needs, our hurts, our expectations that haven't been met. And the Bible says, "Look at the needs of others." Why not say to your spouse, "I'm sorry; I was only thinking of myself." When you say that, and your wife comes out of her swoon, then you can begin to deal with the real issues! But when two immature people both want their own way, conflict is inevitable, and we just need to grow up.

g. **Ask for Advice.** If you're not making progress, even after several "peace conferences," and your home life is deteriorating, get some help. In every other area of life, we're not ashamed to ask a professional for help. We go to a doctor, a lawyer, a CPA. So we need the Christian counsel of a pastor, or a Christian psychologist trained in family therapy, when relationships remain strained.

Some people are more interested in pretending they have a successful marriage than they are in having a good marriage.

And if you hide behind that mask, and project that cool exterior, giving the impression that everything's just fine, who do you think you're kidding? You're certainly not fooling God, and you're not fooling your own family.

It takes courage, a love for your family, and real maturity to seek counseling. If your spouse won't go with you, go yourself. At least you can get help in maturing spiritually.

Proverbs 15:12 (GN) says, "Conceited people do not like to be corrected. They never ask for advice from those who are wiser." And verse 32 of that same chapter says, "If you refuse to learn, you are hurting yourself."

h. Don't give up. Don't walk out in the middle of a fight! Stick with it. Resolve your problems. Conflict resolution is never easy.

You know, there are three stages in any conflict:

(1) Recognition — it goes like this -- "We have a problem."

(2) Reaction - that's when you say -- "It's worse than I thought,"

and that's the painful stage, when voices are raised and there are falling tears, and bitterness and anger come out.

(3) Resolution -- and that's when you say, "What are we going to do about it?"

Unfortunately, many families never get past stage two. You've got to stick with it and never walk away from your problem. Let me tell you something very important -- it is far more rewarding to resolve a conflict than to dissolve a relationship. And you'll do one or the other -- you'll resolve or dissolve. Make a commitment that together you will do whatever it takes to make this thing work. Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest, if we do not give up."

Don't ever give up! God gave you to each other, and He wants you to stay with each other to the very last inch of the very last mile!