



*The #1 catalyst for spiritual growth is reading and reflecting on the Bible.  
Use these questions for personal study or as part of a community group experience.*

## WEEK 5

05/21/2017

**Note to Leaders:** This week, relationships get practical. Conflict resolution and communication are often cited among the major skills that couples need to develop. The foundation for these has been laid in previous weeks and issues from the work of the Holy Spirit in the individual's life. This reflects the common scripture, "from the heart the mouth speaks." With this in mind, you will discuss some scriptures and practical tools that can help with the communication process.

These questions provide a framework to prompt or foster discussion in your group. Don't feel you have to use all or any of these questions! Use the questions that best fit your group and let discussion flow.

### Sermon Questions

1. What thoughts are still resonating with you from the sermon?
2. Is there something from Sunday's message that you feel challenged to try?
3. What text or communication tool stood out to you most? Why?

### Message Outline

Proverbs 27:5-6: Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Proverbs 28:23: Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favor rather than one who has a flattering tongue.

"Conflict is a catalyst for change and an opportunity for growth." - Dr. John Gottman

Ephesians 5:33: Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

**Ladies: Confront respectfully.**

**Men: Listen without getting defensive.**

Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"

## Discussion Questions

1. Why is some conflict inevitable in every marriage? What makes conflict either good or bad?
2. Since some conflict is unavoidable, how would an ideal conflict sound, look, and feel to you?
3. When preparing to address a sensitive or challenging topic, how do you prepare?
4. "Marriage is an opportunity for growth." In what ways might a healthy marriage and healthy conflict produce growth?
5. How has your experience of conflict, whether in your family of origin or past relationships, affected your approach to handling conflict?
6. Reflecting on the passages from Proverbs discussed on Sunday, do you have someone in your life that is given the freedom to speak honestly with you?

If so, what helps make those conversations productive?

7. Derek gave several tips to help males and females successfully address conflict. Were any of these particularly helpful or surprising?
8. Many counselors recommend setting aside time to talk about sensitive or potentially charged topics. What are some pros and cons of this approach?
9. Considering the lists shared in Sunday's message and the list compiled below, which practical tools do you feel would benefit you most? Or benefit your relationships most?
10. Several passages from Ephesians were read—5:22-23, 5:25-27, and 5:33. How might these verses help couples have a growing and healthy marriage?

For many people, these verses often spark negative emotions, often leading to defensiveness. Why do you feel that is? How can these verses be viewed positively?

### Background Comments

Ephesians 5:21-33. The interpretive history of this passage and our social conditioning regarding gender roles has persuaded many people to throw these verses out. No doubt, there have been (generally) men throughout history that have used these verses as a form of control, a means of instilling fear, and justification for the devaluing of women. Healthier—and, I would argue more biblically sound—men recognize in these verses no pretense of superiority or dictatorial authority. Instead, Ephesians 5 calls men to empty themselves on behalf of their wife, to give their life for her, to love her more than self. The image is that of Jesus giving himself up for the Church. Jesus became a servant, deciding to die to his own self-interests and look to our needs instead. This mindset, on the husband's part, invites or beckons his spouse to respond with love and respect, knowing that their love and respect will not be abused, taken advantage of, or turned against them. This is governed by Ephesians 5:21, where each party is challenged to submit to one another out of reverence (respect and submission) for Christ. This is the mark of a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit and living a life of service toward God.

Regarding conflict, respect does not imply absence of confrontation or disagreement. Respect can be offered through tone and expression while confronting unloving behavior, selfishness, or hurt. As a counterpart to respect, self-sacrificial love that Ephesians commands places the value and needs of the other first. These elements are addressed at greater length and with a healthy balance of perspectives in *Love and Respect* by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs; *The Meaning of Marriage* by Timothy Keller; *Epistles to Colossians Philemon, Ephesians* in TNCNT by F.F. Bruce; and, *The Letter to the Ephesians* in PNTC by Peter T. O'Brien.

### Practical Tools for Conflict

- Try starting the conversation on a positive note by expressing appreciation of each other.
- Validate and value the other person.
- Remember you're a team, many times the same goals are being sought. The "how" is often where conflict arises.
- Agree to talk about a topic at a later time, not in the heat of the moment. For example, set aside 30 minutes at time in the future.
- If you feel the conversation is out of control, take a break and set a time to resume it.
- If someone withdraws or shuts down, don't keep pursuing. This will only make them withdraw and avoid more. Help them by ensuring a safe environment where things can be addressed at a more appropriate or manageable pace.
- Determine if it is worth addressing or if it is just a personality difference that should be accepted.
- Express, but be in control of, your emotions.
- Speak to actions and behaviors, not character. No personal attacks.

- Avoid absolutes, “always” and “never.”
- Take ownership for your own contributions to the problem or conflict.
- Use the “xyz” method of communicating. When you do ‘x’, I feel ‘y’, because of ‘z’.
- If conflict is regularly tense, set some ground rules. E.g. don’t seek a solution before each person feels understood, one person speaks at a time, do not make judgments, seek understanding, no yelling, etc.
- If the conversation is hurtful or attacking, step back from the issue itself and talk about the way you are communicating about the problem. How would you like to communicate or how would you like your spouse to communicate with you? We all communicate differently, we need to discover how our spouse communicates and how they interpret our communication.

### **Prayer Requests**

Take a few minutes to go around the room and ask for prayers. Write these down as they are being shared. Additionally, challenge people to begin praying about the step of boldness God may be calling them to during this series. Finally, pray together. You can pray the prayer below or your own prayer that incorporates the requests represented in the group.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father, we pray that you would guide us in truth as we seek to love and communicate better. Grant us, through the Holy Spirit, power to become a better reflection of you. We ask that you give us wisdom and self-control as we pursue healthy conflict. May our love for you and those around us guide us in an attitude of grace and humility. In Jesus name we pray, amen.