



FAMILY

LESSON 4

CONFLICT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE
A DIRTY WORD

HeartLine
CROSSLINE COMMUNITY CHURCH





Get Healthy: Family

Lesson Four: Conflict Doesn't Have to be a Dirty Word

Looking Back: 10 Minutes

1. Last week we discussed the importance of our words. Share how you used your words to build up, encourage, or express appreciation to a family member. How did this make you feel? How did it make the other person feel?
2. Discuss how you are working to overcome a negative habit in the way you communicate with your family (from lesson three, question three).
3. Share a situation where you spoke the truth in love in the past week.
4. What has been the most impactful thing you've learned in *Get Healthy: Family*, so far?

Looking Forward: 50 Minutes

"You two work it out!" I shouted up to my girls, who were arguing upstairs.

The conflict was driving me crazy. And I wanted it to end. *Immediately.*

Most of us view conflict as one giant drain on our emotional, spiritual, relational, and sometimes, even physical, health. So, when it comes to conflict, we just want it to go away.

But here's the thing about conflict: you can't work things out *between you*, if you don't have the tools to work it out, *inside you*.

Someone has to show you how.

Generally, we respond to conflict the way we learned to deal with it as children. Sadly, many of us grow up, but never grow out of our childish conflict styles.

This side of heaven, conflict is here to stay. But we can grow up and learn to deal to with conflict in a healthy, mature way.

1. Read the following descriptions of the six conflict styles. How do you *most often* handle conflict with family members? Circle the one that *most applies*.

A. The Competitor

Likes to argue and debate. Assertive. Believes in standing up for self and defending opinions. Can be threatening or intimidating. Places being “right” over the relationship. **Goal: to win. Resulting feelings: If wins, feels powerful and prideful. If loses, impotent or angry will likely blame others.**

B. The Compromiser

Intimidated by direct confrontation. Seeks a quick middle-ground solution. Doesn’t always fully understand or agree with the other’s perspective, but gives in to end the conflict, or preserve the relationship. **Goal: a quick resolution with minimal conflict. Resulting Feelings: Dissatisfaction, since parties generally focus on what they lost in the compromise.**

C. The Avoider

Pretends conflict never happened or doesn’t exist. Thinks, "If we don't bring it up, it will blow over". Harbors feelings. Doesn’t express views. Allows conflict to fester until it becomes too big to ignore. **Goal: No conflict. Resulting Feelings: Confusion over what went wrong since feelings aren’t verbalized. Internalized hurt, anger, or resentment.**

D. The Accommodator

Gives in to other’s preferences or views. Allows needs of the group to overwhelm their own, which may not ever be stated. Preserving the relationship is seen as most important. Can lead to making peace and moving forward, but can also lead to feelings of resentment toward the other party. **Goal: Keep peace. Resulting Feelings: Powerless. Doormat. No voice.**

E. The Manipulator

Fears expressing their thoughts, feelings and opinions directly, so expresses them through back-door channels. Often uses other people to tell someone what they think, feel, or want. May also use the silent treatment, withdrawal, disapproval, guilt, shame, nagging, lying, or pouting. Is passive/aggressive. **Goal: To control. Resulting Feelings: Powerful if others acquiesce, fearful or angry if others don’t acquiesce.**

F. The Collaborator

Seeks a “win-win” solution to conflict. Listens to understand other’s viewpoints. Focuses on areas of agreement and goals. Thinks creatively to resolve the problem without concessions. Is both assertive and cooperative. **Goal: A solution that satisfies both/all people. Resulting Feelings: Satisfaction. Peace. Harmony.**

2. Fill in the blank: If I could make one thing better about the way I deal with conflict it would be_____.

a. On a scale of 1-10 (poor to excellent) how well do you handle conflict with:

Your husband? _____

Your children? _____

Siblings? _____

Your parents, step-parents and/or in-laws? _____

No matter how you rated your ability to handle conflict, I have good news: you are about to get better!

3. Galatians 5 spells out how a healthy spiritual life positively impacts how we do relationships. Conversely, an unhealthy spiritual life negatively impacts how we do relationships. Read Galatians 5:14-23, written below, and answer the following questions:

¹⁴For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁵ But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.

¹⁶So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. ¹⁷The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. ¹⁸But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

¹⁹When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

²²But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

a. What command is found in verse 14? How do you think this relates to conflict?

- b. Verse 15 makes the warning crystal clear: “If you bite and devour each other...you will be destroyed by each other.” Have you seen this to be true? How?**

- c. We don’t have to destroy each other! Verse 16 holds out a ray of hope. What is it?**

- d. We fight a battle between our flesh (our desire to please ourselves) and the Spirit (our desire to please God). What are the acts of our sinful nature, according to verse 19? Which of these acts relate to conflict?**

- e. If we choose to allow God’s Spirit to control our behavior, what are the results, according to verse 22?**

We cannot be fully relationally healthy if we are not fully spiritually healthy. Relationships are just too hard—especially when it comes to handling conflict.

Without God, our natural inclination is to be selfish, hurtful, prideful, or fearful. But with God’s help, we can lead with love, pursue peace, practice patience, and exercise self-control (I promise, we really can!).

To deal with conflict in a healthy way we must choose to let God guide us; to yield our way of speaking and acting, to God’s way of speaking and acting.

Is this always easy in the heat of a battle? No, it isn’t. But if we don’t choose to handle conflict God’s way, we will bite, devour, and destroy one another. And ultimately, we’ll destroy our relationships.

Thankfully, God gives us a game plan to handle our anger in a way that actually increases intimacy, rather than decreases intimacy.

4. Read Ephesians 4:22-32, written below, and answer the following questions. (Note: we'll camp in Ephesians 4, so know we'll keep coming back to it)

²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin"^[d]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

a. According to verse 23, how (or maybe more accurately, where) are we to be made new?

We are to think differently about our relationships than we did before we were Christ followers.

b. Most people think wrongly about relational conflict. Below you'll find the most common misconceptions. How does Ephesians 4:17-27 address each misconception? The first one has been done for you.

Misconception #1: It's OK if I handle my anger, frustration, hurt, and disappointment in whatever way feels right to me in the moment. (See verse 24)

Truth: *Since I'm a Christian, God has a new—better and healthier—way for me to handle my anger, frustration, hurt, and disappointment. I was created to be like God (mind blowing concept!) in true righteousness and holiness. That means I should seek to handle the hard stuff in a holy way.*

Misconception #2: Conflict pits me against another person—my spouse, my child, my sibling, my parent, my in-laws, etc. (See verse 25b)

Truth:

Misconception #3: Christians shouldn't get mad. Anger is a sin. (See verse 26)

Truth:

Misconception #4: Unresolved anger is no big deal. (See verses 26-27)

Truth:

Why take the time to identify misconceptions about anger and conflict?

Because my thoughts *about* conflict, affect my actions *in* conflict.

For example, if I think conflict is bad, I'll avoid it at all costs. Not healthy.

If I think Christians aren't supposed to get angry, I won't speak the truth, and I'll be passive/aggressive, instead. Not healthy.

If I think conflict means one person wins, and one person loses, I'll gear up for a fight, which will probably end in all kinds of ugly. Not healthy.

If I think it's OK to go to bed angry, I'll build up resentment and bitterness. Not healthy.

Are you starting to see why how we view conflict is so important?

To handle conflict in a healthy way *we need to know a few things*, and *we need to do a few things*.

Here's what we need to know in order to handle conflict in a healthy, Christ-like way:

Conflict is neither right nor wrong.

Let that sink in for a moment. There is nothing wrong with you, your marriage, or your relationship with a family member, if you have conflict. (I know some of you don't believe me, but it's true!)

What makes us feel like conflict is bad is the fact that most of us haven't learned to deal with it in a way that makes it turn out good.

When handled correctly, conflict can actually create *more* intimacy and *more* closeness between two people. Why? Because an issue that once stood between you, is removed; a truth that once went unaddressed is discussed; a wound that once caused resentment is forgiven; an annoyance that once caused frustration is fixed.

Conflict isn't right or wrong. But how we deal with it, is.

So how do we deal with conflict in a healthy way?

Here's what we need to do to handle conflict in a healthy, Christ-like way (since I'm a simple gal, I'm going to break this up into simple, do-able steps):

Step #1: Identify the Real Issue

5. Look back at the Ephesians 4 passage. How does Ephesians 4:25b instruct us to speak?

In order to speak the truth, we must know the truth. The most fundamental component in resolving conflict is identifying the real issue. Often we argue about surface issues, not the real issues. Is it any wonder we go round, and round, with no resolution in sight?

Often the real issues are simple: someone is hungry. Tired. Stressed. Frustrated. Hormonal. In chronic pain.

For heaven's sake, let's not make life more complicated than it has to be—let's fix the real issues when they are simple! Give your child a snack. Let your husband watch the ball game, or have sex (with you, of course!) Find a place for your kids to keep their homework. Exercise. Eat right. Sleep. Take a bath.

a. What real (and simple) issue can you be more attuned to, so your family has less conflict?

Step #2: Stop Conflict Before It Starts, When Possible

- 6. Speaking truth also involves expressing needs, desires, concerns, and expectations, *clearly*. It's unfair, unrealistic, and unhealthy to expect your family to read your mind. What expectation, need, concern, or desire can you communicate more clearly? How could this help your family avoid conflict before it begins?**

"Expectation without communication leads to frustration" – JP Jones

Step #3: Treat Your Family Like Teammates

- 7. According to Ephesians 4:25, why are we to speak truthfully to each other?**
 - a. When emotions run high, it's easy to view our family member as the opposition rather than the companion. How would addressing an area of conflict from the perspective of being teammates (i.e. on the same side) help you and your husband/child/parent/step-parent/etc. more easily find a resolution without unnecessary anger?**
 - b. Share an example of how this principle has worked for you.**

Step #4: Be Angry When You Should

- 8. How does Ephesians 4:26-27 instruct us to deal with our anger?**

Healthy women don't make the small things big, and they don't make the big things small.

How do we know if something is big or small? I like to say conflict comes in one of three forms:

- **Irritations**
- **Insults**
- **Issues**

Irritations are the stuff that bothers us, or frustrates us: The teenager's messy room. The way the dishwasher gets loaded. (I actually knew a couple that fought about this). The family member who moves like a sloth. This stuff is the small stuff. It doesn't mean we don't address these irritations; it just means we keep things in perspective. *Irritations make us crazy, only if we let them.*

But then there are conflicts that arise out of insults: Someone makes a snide remark. Our spouse tells a joke at our expense. A child speaks disrespectfully to us. While irritations frustrate us, *insults can damage us, if we let them.* When our character, our position, or personhood is insulted, it must be addressed. (Remember how we discussed speaking the truth in love, last week? Well, here's where we put it into action!) An insult is a big thing we can't make small, without damaging consequences.

Finally, some conflicts center around issues: How we spend our money. How we discipline the child. How we spend our free time. How we pass on our spiritual values. If irritations can frustrate us, and insults can damage us, *issues can scare us, if we let them.*

You know what people do when they are scared?

Fight or Flight.

And now we are back to our unhealthy conflict styles, aren't we? Compete. Avoid. Manipulate. Accommodate.

Unless we choose to deal with anger God's way.

Step #5: Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Your Anger (Seriously. Don't.)

- 9. In your experience, what happens when you fail to resolve a conflict the same day it occurs? What happens when you work through a conflict as soon as possible? Which leaves you feeling more at peace?**

- a. **If working through conflict brings you more peace, which of the following stops you from dealing with conflicts as soon as possible?**
- **Pride**
 - **Fear**
 - **Shame**
 - **Resentment**
 - **Hurt**
 - **Too busy**
 - **I don't know how**

Step #6 Choose Humility and Kindness (even if you don't feel like it in the moment)

10. Have someone in your group read Ephesians 4:29-32 out loud.

- a. **What role do words play in resolving conflict?**
- b. **What role does humility play in resolving conflict?**
- c. **What role does compassion and forgiveness play in resolving conflict?**
- d. **Is there anyone in your family to whom you need to apologize?**
- e. **Is there anyone in your family you need to forgive?**

Life Application:

1. Re-read this lesson in its entirety. This lesson contains lots of information, and it will take more than one pass to grasp it all. As you read, highlight or make notes. What will you begin to apply? Don't be general. Be specific.
2. Take note when you feel frustrated, irritated, angry, or hurt this week. Ask yourself, "What caused these feelings? What's the real issue? Is it a big thing or small thing?" Respond to the situation based on what you've learned about handling conflict in a healthy way.

Optional: Further Reading, Reflection and Bible Study

1. Look up the following verses and write down what each teaches you about how to deal with anger.
 - a. Proverbs 15:1
 - b. James 1:19-21
 - c. 1 Peter 2:21-23
 - d. Genesis 16 (as you read, note the two women's conflict styles)

