



God's Purpose for Conflict in Marriage

These principles are taken from the article "What God Hath Joined" by Del Fehsenfeld, Jr.

1. *Let me emphasize that there is no conflict too great for God to reconcile.* There is no partner too immoral or wicked for God to change. You must begin to exercise faith that God is bigger than your situation, and be willing to wait for Him to work.

2. *Learn to transfer your focus from your mate's failures (although he or she may be 95% wrong!) and begin to accept personal responsibility.* In many discussions on difficult situations in marriage, the focus is on the "innocent party." Often it is the presumed "innocent party" who comes for counseling. I have begun to ask these men and women, "If your mate had been married to Jesus, would she (or he) have behaved this way?" Invariably, the answer is, "No." The realization then begins to dawn that, "Everything in my life that is not like Christ has been a contributing factor to the failure of my marriage." I encourage these individuals to make a list of every area in their life (attitudes, values, priorities, actions, words) that is not like Jesus, and to ask God to change them, so He will then be free to change their mate.

After talking with thousands of married couples, I have seldom found a loving, submissive woman with a husband who is abusive or immoral. Just as rare is a loving, committed, unselfish man with a domineering or immoral wife. Ask God to reveal to you from His Word any failures in your own attitudes, actions, or spirit. Then cooperate with Him to become all that He wants you to be.

3. *You must be willing to allow God to use the pressures of your marriage to achieve eternal spiritual results in your life.* God is committed to conforming us to the image of Jesus. This is a lifelong process, and one which requires many tools and much pressure (much as the purest gold is formed under intense pressure over long periods of time). God uses the adverse circumstances in which we find ourselves as opportunities to learn to respond in Christ-likeness. He actually may create circumstances from which we cannot escape, so that we will be forced to learn what He wants to teach us. God intended for marriage to be one such binding relationship, knowing full well the inevitable conflicts that would arise because of our human selfishness. In these times of hurt and apparent failure, the most natural thing to do is to squeeze our way out of the vice in which He has placed us. As a result, we automatically forfeit the full expression of His character that He was trying to develop in us. However, if we will patiently remain in that binding relationship, He will ultimately be able to achieve His purposes in our lives.

4. *If you are committed to becoming like Jesus, you must be willing to suffer in a quiet, patient spirit.* Our human nature wants to find the easiest way out of painful situations. But Jesus was willing to suffer abusive, harsh, and unjust treatment so that we might be reconciled to God. In the same way, God's Word teaches that we have been called to suffer (I Peter 2:21), on behalf of others. I Peter 2:21-3:6 emphasizes that a believer's willingness to stay in his marriage and suffer quietly may be the only means by which the other partner will eventually be healed. [Note: by "suffer quietly" we are not referring to situations of physical abuse. We believe that when physical abuse is occurring in the home, the abused spouse (or parent of children being abused) should appeal to spiritual and civil authorities who have been ordained by God for our protection.]

5. *Remember that, even in the case of persistent immorality and unfaithfulness, forgiveness and reconciliation are the goal – not divorce.* The Old Testament provides a beautiful illustration of this kind of love and forgiveness. The

prophet Hosea married a woman and lavished gifts on her. She took the gifts and used them to buy other lovers. She became a prostitute and ended up in slavery. Though she expressed no desire to return to her husband, Hosea went into the slave market and bought her back to be his wife once again. This tender picture reveals the loving heart of God toward us. And it is a powerful reminder that we are to be partners with God in the business of redemption— not breaking up marriages because of offenses.