**Working Through Marital Conflict**

**Rebecca Lutzer**

1. If you have bitterness toward your husband or wife and your heart is closed and hard, ask God, even beg God, to soften your heart toward them.
2. Admit when you’re wrong and willingly forgive without punishing. Being stubborn, angry, haughty, arrogant, rude, bossy, nagging, demanding, or insisting you are always right….is wrong and sinful. Neither one of you are married to someone who is perfect! Choose to say, “I’m sorry” or I was wrong” without playing games.
3. Be kind and tenderhearted to one another. “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger…be put away from you. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32 is the gold standard in overcoming the differences and difficulties of marriage***. Kindness*** is being sympathetic, helpful, forbearing, gentle, providing relief or pleasure. ***Tenderhearted*** is being easily moved to love, acts of kindness, compassion, understanding, showing pity or sorrow. ***Forgiving*** is absorbing the hurt or loss and letting them go free (like Jesus did).
   1. Choose your response: anger or forgiveness. Eph. 4:26: “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.”
   2. Speak words of life, not words of death, Prov. 17:27: “Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man (or woman) of understanding.” Prov.14:1: “The wisest of women builds her house, but folly….hands tears it down.”
4. It may be difficult or impossible to approach your mate to resolve conflict or longstanding issues.
   1. If they will not talk with you, write a note and hand it to them. Speaking with kindness say, “\_\_\_\_, it is very important for you to read this and give me a response.”
   2. Again with kindness and without anger, a statement you can make to really get your husband’s/wife’s attention: “It is urgent that we talk about the survival of our marriage because we cannot go on like this.”
   3. If your mate is unwilling to talk with you, then reply, “I’m feeling desperate and need help to resolve whatever has gone wrong in our relationship. Are you willing to go with me to talk to a pastor or counselor?” If they are unwilling to seek help with you, say with a broken but tender heart, “Then I must go alone to seek help.”
   4. An honest question you can ask of each other, “Is there something that I’ve said or done that has hurt you or shut your heart to me? I want to make it right.”
5. When having an argument or disagreement that is not resolving or you’re unable to reach a solution, you can respectfully say, “I’m sorry, but right now I’m emotionally unable to talk about this anymore. I want to revisit it when I’ve had time to think and pray.” Don’t leave each other in an angry attitude.
   1. Pray and ask God to change your attitude and give you wisdom. Retrain yourself to be self-controlled (fruit of the Spirit). At this point, be willing to ***forgive***, if needed.
   2. Find coping mechanisms to clear your head and steady your emotions. Go for a walk or do some exercises. Get busy working on a project or do some cleaning. Listen to some calming music.
   3. Then together, instead of just discussing the problem(s), begin to ***solve*** the problem(s) and come up with solutions that you agree on and that are realistic and affordable. At this point you are being ***kind*** and ***tenderhearted****.*
6. What is the greatest source of your differences: personalities, birth order, male/female, family of origin, an event in your life that hurt you deeply and caused you to close up? Take time to identify and discuss your differences. Listen to each other, and choose to accept and respect each other’s differences.
7. Choose to accept your husband/wife for who they are, their personality and gifting, and how they were influenced by their upbringing and life experiences. After all, you chose this one person out of all the people in the world to marry! You don’t have to like everything about your spouse. We all have quirks, mannerisms, and personality habits that can be annoying. In your discussions, you can talk about the things that bother you, and ask if any of your behavior bothers them. You can respectfully ask each other to stop them or make some changes. If neither of you are willing, then ask God for the grace to accept and overlook it. However, if their behavior is harmful to you or your children, tell them that you will seek outside intervention and help.
8. Make a list of qualities and things you like and appreciate about each other and exchange them. Pray for and with each other. Begin to give frequent compliments.
9. Discover each other’s love language. You can determine this by the way(s) you express love to others, by what you request most often from others, and by what you complain about most often.
   1. Words of Affirmation: kind, encouraging, compliments
   2. Quality Time: undivided attention—walking, talking, listening, eye contact. Don’t interrupt. Listen to their words, and observe their body language and feelings.
   3. Gifts: a symbol of an affectionate thought—I’m important to her and she’s thinking about me.
   4. Acts of service: serve, do kind things—expend your time, effort, and energy to make their load lighter.
   5. Physical touch: touching, holding hands, kissing/hugs, sitting close, physical presence, back rubs, making love.
10. At least once a year, take the time to go away for a couple of days to rest, communicate honestly, pray together for your marriage/family/ministry, and renew your physical and emotional love.