

The Christian's Marital Conflict Resolution Triangle, Part 2

By Daryl Wingerd



Remember the “triangular” conflict resolution strategy we are discussing in this four-part series, with the three equally important sides being truth, humility, and love. In Part 1 we began discussing the first side of the triangle — truth — with two points: **First**, marriage must be grounded in the truth of the gospel, centering around grace, mercy, and forgiveness. **Second**,

you must believe the truth about the prospects for reconciliation and the future of your marriage.

Now consider two more facets of truth:

Third, you must resolve to understand the truth about your specific conflict.

False versions of reality are easily created when one or both spouses rely on feelings, assumptions, impressions, or suspicions. What are the facts? What are the real issues? What really happened? What was actually said? If you're not dealing with facts, you'll always be frustrated, trying in vain to hit a subjective, ever-shifting target.

The truth may not be easily ascertained when the disagreement concerns subjective matters or accusations about motives (e.g., “You were harsh,” or “You were disrespectful.”) or (“You said that because . . .”). Rather than speculating or assuming or insisting that you know your spouse's motives, address what he or she actually said or did, and then lovingly explain how those words or actions made you feel. Don't try to prosecute your spouse for the motives you are certain hide behind his or her actions or words. This approach only tends to produce defensiveness. The loving, honest, non-accusatory approach, on the other hand, tends to yield compassion and is more likely to reveal truth at a deeper level.

A similar difficulty exists when “the truth” is buried in memories of years-past or decades-past events or patterns of conduct. We all tend to label and characterize these memories differently in our minds. We also are prone to emphasize different aspects of these shared memories, even when both spouses witnessed the exact same event. We all should admit that our memories get fuzzy with the passage of time. In these situations, “the truth” may not be something you can realistically agree on no matter

how long you contend about it. It is never profitable to allow a conflict to spiral into a quarrelsome back-and-forth over an unresolvable difference about a historical event or pattern of conduct. Humility (see Part 3) should lead both spouses to be less than dogmatic about such things.

Lastly, though it may be tempting at times when a conflict seems impossible to resolve, there is no genuine resolution when one spouse apologizes for something he or she didn't actually say or do or intend. While this kind of false apology may appear to bring peace, you should not do this, and you should not want your spouse to do this. Why?

- Because it's not the truth. It's a dishonest way to end the conflict.
- Because it gives both spouses a false perception that the issue has been resolved when it has not.
- Because it short-circuits what God may be doing to reveal in you and/or your spouse what truly caused, extended, or intensified the conflict.

Fourth, you must resolve to always speak the truth to your spouse, and about your spouse. Honesty is essential for trust in marriage. Your spouse needs to have the solid assurance that you will not lie, even when the truth is embarrassing or humbling.

Exaggerating about your spouse for the sake of dramatic effect is not telling the truth. For example, you should avoid saying “you always” or “you never” because those two statements are rarely true.

Lastly, remember that your husband is not his father, and your wife is not her mother. You may notice patterns of conduct in your in-laws that you would not want your spouse to emulate (Thankfully the opposite is often true as well!). Your spouse may recognize certain characteristics of his father or her mother that are, shall we say, best left behind. He or she may be working hard not to manifest the same patterns in his or her own life. Nevertheless, because there are visual similarities, vocal similarities, similar personalities, or even similar tendencies toward weakness, it can be all-too-easy for you to subconsciously project the characteristics of the father onto the son, or the mother onto the daughter. When you do this, you unfairly and *untruthfully* estimate and characterize your own spouse.

In **Part 3**, I will address the second side of the marriage conflict resolution triangle—**humility**. **Part 4** will then cover the third and foundational side of the triangle—**love**.

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