

The Christian's Marital Conflict Resolution Triangle, Part 3

By Daryl Wingerd



The three equally important qualities that will facilitate healthy conflict resolution in marriage are truth, humility, and love. We are considering these three as a triangle. In Parts 1 and 2 we began discussing the first side of the triangle — truth. Now we will discuss the second side — humility.

Humility is really nothing more than the accurate assessment of yourself — your difficult personality traits, the relational sins you struggle with, and your own flaws and weaknesses as a husband or wife (in other words, the things God, and to a lesser degree your spouse and others, already see more clearly than you do).

The humble person focuses on his or her own weaknesses before shining the spotlight on those in a spouse. This “me-primarily” or “my-flaws-first” focus, when consistently applied, will play a key role in resolving conflict. It can also reduce the number of conflicts in your marriage.

Here's how this works:

- Humility motivates you to overlook many faults in your spouse, choosing instead to magnify his or her qualities. Humility also makes you thankful that your spouse overlooks much in you.
- Humility produces genuine forbearance, preventing you from treasuring up the things you are supposedly “overlooking” in your spouse, only to recall them in a later conflict to illustrate your point or magnify your spouse's flaws.
- Humility inclines you to hear your spouse's concerns and receive correction, without becoming defensive (even if the concern or correction is not delivered with the perfect tone or timing).
- Humility makes you a better listener. It makes you more eager to truly understand and appreciate your spouse's perspective, and less inclined to interrupt so that you can restate your own perspective (again, and again, and again. . .).

- Humility makes you prone to putting your spouse's needs ahead of your own (cf. Philippians 2:1-5), and less inclined toward selfishness, which is the root cause of many marital conflicts.
- Humility makes you quick to admit you were wrong and to seek forgiveness. Even when faced with a subjective complaint (e.g., “You were harsh” or “You were disrespectful”), humility will lead you to admit that even if you did not intend harshness or disrespect, your words or actions or facial expressions or body language may have conveyed a different tone.
- Humility motivates you to forgive quickly and unconditionally when your spouse confesses sin and repents. As Paul wrote in Colossians 3:13, “As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”
- Even when you are wronged by a serious sin, humility draws your mind to Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35. Please read it now if you are not familiar with it. Regardless of the seriousness of your spouse's sin against you, in Jesus' parable, *you* are the servant who was forgiven the 10,000 talents, and *your spouse* is the servant who owes you a paltry (by comparison) 100 denarii.
- Humility makes you eligible to receive God's grace in resolving conflict, whereas pride invites his opposition to your efforts. As both Peter and James tell us, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; 1 Peter. 5:5).
- Humility makes you less likely to be thinking, “I'm really glad (or “I really hope”) my spouse is reading this, because he/she really needs it!” Humility informs you that you really need it first.

In **Part 4** I will address the third and foundational side of the marriage conflict resolution triangle—**love**. This third side will be critical to understand and apply since love, as Paul tells us, is that “which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:14).

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