

For Women Only
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Irreconcilable Differences

Will the Conflict Ever End?

We hear the words “irreconcilable differences” used many times as a reason for divorce. Isn’t that just another way of saying “unresolved conflict?” The world has distorted the meaning of many words and phrases. Conflict in marriage is inevitable, so why is there so little damage control? What are we going to do about it? There are a number of avenues one can take with the onset of conflict but you must always keep in mind your final destination.

If the final destination is truly reconciliation and healing, then we need healthier ways of dealing with conflict. For years I traveled down unproductive paths that led to frustration and hurt – both for me and for Gary. One of those was avoidance. Even when I felt very convicted about a subject or an issue in our marriage or family, often I would just keep quiet – not speaking up to voice my opinion. That would lead to an inner anger and deep frustration that may surface in a later, unrelated argument. The most obvious result of my tendency to “bury” things was that we experienced no changes in our marriage dynamics. Often that would result, in turn, to a destructive self-talk – “Gary is never going to change” or “Nobody has ever cared how I feel, so why bother now?”

In sharp contrast to avoidance, another path onto which I would often wander was that of aggressive confrontation. In those situations, I would hold back nothing. I wanted Gary to hurt like I was hurting. As a result anything and everything was fair game. If I had “stuffed” things in the past, this was the time when it all came out. Invariably, going down this path led to both of us forgetting what the original issue was. The conflict simply became an exercise in hurting the other and defending oneself – a battle of the wills. The result of this approach was that both of us retreated into our own worlds, often not speaking to one another for days, while we licked our wounds.

For years those were my main means of operation and the damage left behind was not a pretty sight. Then one day God showed me His way. When conflict blocks you from moving on, ask God, “What is really going on here?” You may be surprised to find that conflict may sound like a negative but when God is at the controls it may be the best paved road to self-awareness.

The healthier approach that both Gary and I attempt to call upon when we feel tension or strife arising between us is to call a “time out.” We don’t avoid the topic, but, rather, we choose to set a time to continue the discussion after each of us has had an opportunity to go to God and to collect our thoughts. The question, “What is really going on here?” is particularly relevant at this point. I truly want to know God’s perspective on the situation, so I ask Him. It is powerful to see the things that God will reveal to me during these times of reflection. The question also applies to *my heart*. “What is really going on here?” Is it really about Gary or is it a deep

unhealed wound that I buried long ago? Knowing that Gary is going through the same process makes coming together to discuss the situation far less intimidating and destructive.

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results (Ben Franklin). When I finally realized that our “irreconcilable differences” were not allowing us to create the marriage and home that God intended for us, I chose a different path. You, too, can choose to deal with conflict with your spouse in a different manner. Even if you initially travel this path alone, without your spouse, you will be astounded at the changes in your marriage dynamics.