

Conflict—it is inevitable.

By B. D. Tate

I want to share some tools, tips, and principles to help overcome conflict. The following scriptures helped us to realize what is at the core of our fighting:

- 1) Pr 13:10 “By **pride** comes nothing but strife, **But with the well–advised is wisdom.**”

If we are fighting, which is another word for strife it is because of pride. It’s not that our mate is full of pride; it is that both are...

- 2) Pr 11:2 “When **pride** comes then comes shame; **but with the humble is wisdom.**”

Shame is when you know what you should do but don’t do it; instead we go ahead and then suffer for it. The exposure of deciding to do the wrong brings shame. At the core of this type of decision making is pride.

- 3) Pr 28:25 “**He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the LORD will be prospered.**”

What is causing or stirring up the fighting between us? Pride, is taking the high position, the superior, I’m right, I’m not (never) wrong, etc...these attitudes press within us to defend, fight, justify, and point out the wrongs of others...

- 4) 1Co 13:4 “**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.**”

Love is what we are supposed to practice and love is not proud. Love is not passive, or a doormat; but it doesn’t become threatened, nor lash out either. Love speaks the truth (as we see it) and is willing to let others be wrong, and is willing to see oneself as possibly being wrong???

- 5) 1Co 4:7 “**For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?**”

This passage helps keep everything in perspective. All that we are, all that we have, we have received it from God. We are to humble ourselves in our marriage and realize that our mate is God’s choice for us.

- 6) Pr. 15:1 “**A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**”

This is a challenging verse because all of us want to dish it back when attacked, accused, or condemned (by our mate especially).

- 7) Pr. 15:18 “**A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.**”

This speaks to other issues that contribute to the fighting within a marriage, such as left over anger, baggage that might include fear, insecurity, burdened by lack of money, lack of job, lack of self respect, hurts, pains, unforgiveness, feeling bottled up and misunderstood, not being listened to...

- 8) Pr 17:14 “**The beginning of strife is like releasing water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.**”

To our surprise we could actually stop quarreling before it started! We didn’t have to continue into the fray...sometimes you have to know when to “fold up, hold up, walk away...”

9) Pr 20:3 “**It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel.**”

Any fool? Now that can't be us?

10) Pr 26:17 “**He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own Is like one who takes a dog by the ears.**”

Interesting isn't it...

11) 2Ti 2:24 “**And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient...**”

I'm not suggesting that our fighting and quarreling means were not God's servants; it is just that God's Spirit is **not** fueling the mess...

Okay, enough with scriptures right now...

Tools:

- 1) **No one has all the truth!** This means each of us sees the truth we have only in part. It means that we are looking at the world we live in through dim glasses that are smeared, smudged by our own pride, arrogance, and willful hearts. It means that our own hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked being influenced by our own selfishness. The scriptures says, Pr 14:12 “There is a way *that seems right* to a man, but its end *is* the way of death.” And again, Pr 16:25 “There is a way *that seems right* to a man, But its end *is* the way of death.”
- 2) **It takes two to “tango.”** This means that any argument takes two to make it happen. I can't rationalize and declare that I'm innocent and the other is guilty when a fight has taken place. No one can fight alone; it takes another. If two are involved then two are responsible. This doesn't mean that one is as equally guilty; it is saying that it takes both for a fight to occur.
- 3) **Don't use “generalalities!”** This means using terms like “Never” or “Always” which generalize specific behaviors into general ones is judgmental and wrong. It is an aggressive accusation that is based on half truth. If I say, “You always do that...” or “You never this or that...” it inflames and stirs up the pot so to speak because it boxes us in. In other words “speak for yourself using “I” statements...” what I feel,” “what bothers me,” all the while giving room for the other's opinion...(we) I could be wrong.
- 4) **Avoid accusing.** Use language that describes how we feel, how something comes across to us, how it hits us; but don't accuse and condemn. We think we see things the way they are, we are convinced because our hearts are deceitful and actually wicked. The truth may reside somewhere between viewpoints; but we believe ours IS THE TRUTH! This deception is not always easy to shred away. If as a believer in Jesus Christ, we can begin to realize that our opinion is NOT THE TRUTH, but subject to the truth of God's word, we'll be better able to prevent our part in the “tango.”
- 5) **Keep the issue from becoming personal.** When our arguments seem weak we attack the other person. We don't say that the idea is stupid we say that he/she is stupid. We need to keep the issue on focus, the dispute itself, the action, the sin, and keep the sinner out of it. When we attack the person it may reflect our own personal struggle and insecurities.

- 6) **Insecurities are deadly.** Marriage is a covenant that must be built on trust. Trust is not given it is earned. The relationship boundaries message on the CD helps to understand this principle. Our fears or insecurities can drive us to be irrational, suspicious, distrusting, etc. Consideration is meant to build trust. To some degree the first year or two of marriage is a transformation of learning to think as one instead of two. We are getting on each others side instead of being on our own side. It takes time because trust is built by choices, decisions, and actions that agree with marriage. The best thing we can say to our mate sometimes is, “I said this or that because I was afraid.” Trust and give respect for the feelings of the other...validating feelings doesn't mean we necessarily agree, it means I respect your person.
- 7) **Everything we are, desires, wishes, feelings, personality is a gift.** We need to understand that we are not the OWNERS or source of anything. What we believe, what we think, how we reason, are all gifts of life. This means that what we are arguing about is my opinion about the truth as opposed to being THE TRUTH. All concepts, ideas, strategies, etc. are not owned either, no one has an original thought we are thinking God's thoughts after Him so to speak.
- 8) **We are not the enemy!** Sin nature, selfishness, the flesh, ignorance, pride, evil, the satanic propaganda, materialism, etc. these things are the enemy. Eph 6:12 “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.”
- 9) **Practice Biblical Understanding for each other!** This means sin nature is sin nature in every one. We judge others because of their weaknesses; yet, we have our own. Matt. Mt 7:1 “Judge not, that you be not judged.” No one can throw the first stone; no one can judge another for we are all sinners. The truth is that if I grew up in the same way, experienced the same things, had needs unmet, lived in his or her shoes, I could do what they do or worse! My sin nature is not better or worse than any one else. The difference between Christians and non Christians is that we repent! Gross sinners are only those who have lived to their sin nature more...
- 10) **As Iron Sharpens Iron, so we sharpen each other Pr 27:17 “As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”** The trick is to not stick or smash or crush each other. Disagreements, conflicts, arguments can often increase our understanding of what the other is feeling or experiencing in the marriage.
- 11) **Debriefing is a daily necessity.** Married couples need to debrief the events of their day with each other. This allows communication and a sense of belonging to each other occur. It also allows pent up emotions, disappointments, discouragements, even disillusionments to be expressed in a safe place. Debriefing requires listening skills which I describe in one of the parenting responsibilities on the CD. Sometimes we would argue because we were not able to talk with each other due to busyness.
- 12) **Don't threaten each other—no name calling.** This means the “D” word is not used—ever! It also means we don't threaten to leave. The word “hate” is not used, and name calling is childish, of the flesh, and only feels good for a

short period of time...names like idiot, stupid, jerk, bitch, Son of, etc. There are times when giving each other space is necessary. The space is time to calm down, relax from work, or some individual time.

Marriage is not meant to be the end-all relationship. **No mate can be a god to the other. No mate can fulfill or meet all the needs of the other.** Friendships should be maintained, community involvement encouraged (like church), personal hobbies, personal workouts, personal time respected. The teaching on “Relationship Boundaries” should be the guide it is on the CD too.

I grimace when I think about what it was like for Valerie and me. We argued a lot during our first years. It took us some time to develop trust and be on the same side. We’ve had arguments over the years too. Some of our arguments were knock-down drag-out kind that was absolutely draining. Has she thrown anything at you yet? Has she hit you yet? (I never did anything to cause such behavior but it was my cross to bear...)

You know there is a lot of condemnation to the person who uses physical violence; what is not addressed is the provocation side of things. Provocation pulls the cords, the strings, pushes the right buttons, knowing what to say to penetrate, hurt, and provoke the other. There is a saying something like, “You hurt the ones you love the most.” That is because we know them best.

The final advice I want to leave you is be **FORGIVING!** Sometimes in an argument we say things out of pain and anger that we don’t really mean. Sometimes we address everything under the sun and throw in the kitchen sink too. What I’m saying is that often things get so emotional and messed up it’s like spaghetti. We are never going to be able to unravel it all or make it make sense—so just let the whole thing go. After a big one, the hurricane size, we’ll finally take a break from the action, and when we feel so bad and realize that it’s not worth it. We’ll look at each other and say, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean half of what I was saying.” We’ll forgive and try to forget it. I’m not saying that we repress true feelings in order to get along. I’m not saying that we don’t express our concerns, opinions, feelings, or frustrations, in order to get along; no, we need to vent, we need to be allowed to speak; but we don’t make our issues more important than our mate. The only thing more important than our mate is God.