

Your Spouse Is Not the Enemy

By America's Family Coaches

Do you sometimes find yourself competing with your spouse over who is right or whose way will prevail in a decision or conflict? This type of friction is present in many marriage relationships.

When conflict arises, many couples are quick to take opposite positions on the “battle line.” Husband and wife see each other as adversaries to be defeated. We’re out to score a victory for “our side,” to show the enemy who the boss is, to make sure our cause is vindicated—even if it’s only where we squeeze the toothpaste tube. Marriage is not a war. Personal preferences are not beachheads to be conquered at all costs. Differences of opinion are not battles to be won. Hey, you’re on the same team! Conflicts and difficulties are things to be worked out together in a spirit of teamwork and cooperation for the mutual good. Yet so often we chip away at each other, jostling to come out ahead. And we end up offending and hurting each other in the process. Here is a starting point for any confrontation, a starting point that virtually guarantees your confrontation won’t turn into a battle. Begin with these four words: “Let’s pray together first.” These words will not only disarm any conflict but also set the stage for a constructive, decision-making discussion.

Prayer makes a positive impact on the resolution of conflict. It welcomes into the debate a third party—Jesus—and determines that you are willing to play by his rules. When you both decide to meet on Jesus’ turf, you are naturally opening yourself up to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit as the grounds for making your decision and resolving your conflict. You will be challenged to ask, “What does the Bible say about our situation? Are there clear commands we need to obey? What other biblical principles apply to the issue?” When you look to God’s Word, you level the playing field by welcoming God’s solution.

When you find the courage to say, “Let’s pray together first,” be prepared to say a few more things in order to clear up the conflict and heal any hurt you may have caused.

“I was wrong.” When the Holy Spirit reveals your part in offending your spouse, it’s not enough to say, “If you think I did something wrong, let’s talk about it.” Nor is it appropriate to say, “I don’t think it was such a big deal, but if you think it was...” Tell it as it is with statements like these: “I was wrong”; “What I did/said was wrong”; “I offended you, and it was wrong”; “I need to talk to you about what I did to hurt you.”

“I’m sorry.” Admitting you were wrong is very important, but you also need to express your sorrow over the hurt your wrong behavior caused: “I was wrong, and I’m so sorry that I hurt you.” By expressing your sorrow, you demonstrate empathy for your hurting spouse.

“I don’t ever want to hurt you this badly again.” Saying you were wrong is a statement of confession. Saying you are sorry is a statement of contrition or sorrow. They must be followed by a statement of repentance, which expresses your desire to turn from your hurtful ways. “I don’t want to hurt you again” is a way of saying any hurt you cause is unintentional and distressing to you. Repentance opens the door to deep healing.

“Will you forgive me?” Here you place yourself at your spouse’s feet, taking the servant’s position. It is a demonstration of your humility. Anything less than acknowledging your wrong, your sorrow, your repentance, and your humility is cheap forgiveness. The full approach, which is bathed in prayer together, is forgiving love at its best.

If there’s a conflict brewing in your marriage, take the initiative today to bring the two of you together in prayer and find a resolution that will heal that hurt.