



## Conversation #5: *our future*

**Are you excited about the future?** It probably looks pretty bright from where you're sitting right now. After all, you're making plans to spend it with the one you love. You're feeling good.

And while we would never want to dampen your feelings, we do want to take some time to consider the realities: There are hard times ahead; your love will be tested. So, as you think about your future together, we want now to offer some help that can keep you fighting for each other even when you're at odds.

Beyond that, in this final conversation, we also want to take a high view of the hopes you have for your life together. But first, let's try to get out ahead of the conflict that is sure to come.

### RESOLVING CONFLICT

Romantic feelings are intoxicating and a true gift of God's grace to a newly married couple. Those feelings should be appreciated, celebrated, and reveled in as a husband and wife, no doubt. However, we all know that romance can be fickle—you can be swimming in it one day, and the next feel as if your relationship has been completely drained of it. It can be incredibly powerful and then altogether absent, depending on the specific circumstances you find yourself in.

While you are in this current stage as an engaged couple, happily preparing for marriage, we don't want you to get blindsided by the probability that your excitement may wane, come back, and then wane again. Repeat.



But there is good news. Christians don't build their marriages on romance but on Jesus. Romance is great and you definitely want it in your marriage, but it's unreliable as a foundation. Christ is not.

In light of this good news, it's important to look to the foundation first—on the unchanging love of Christ—and then move into the practicalities of what to do when conflict arises in your future marriage.

Based on our upbringing, family history, temperament, and so on, we all approach resolving conflict in different ways. As Christians, though, let's make a habit of turning to God's Word.

1) What does the following verse have to say about resolving conflict?

*“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (EPHESIANS 4:26)*

Resolving conflict means...

2) What happens in a relationship when this principle is not applied?





In marriage, it's common for both individuals to react to conflict in different ways. Here are the four most common reactions:

- **Fight to Win:** This is the “I win, you lose” or “I’m right, you’re wrong” position. You seek to dominate the other person and personal relationships take second place to the need to triumph.
- **Withdraw:** You seek to avoid conflict and the ensuing discomfort at all costs, saying, “I’m uncomfortable, so I’ll get out.” You see no hope of resolving the conflict, or you lack the strength to confront it. You cope by giving your spouse the silent treatment.
- **Yield:** You assume it is far better to go along with the other person’s demands than to risk a confrontation. Rather than start another argument, you say, “Whatever you want is fine.” To you, a safe feeling is more important than a close relationship.
- **Lovingly Resolve:** You commit to resolving the conflict by taking steps to carefully and sensitively discuss the issue. Resolving a conflict requires a special attitude—one of humility, of placing the relationship at a higher priority than the conflict itself. You value your relationship more than winning or losing, escaping or feeling comfortable.

With the first three of these styles, you actually create as many problems as you solve. Fighting to win, withdrawing, or yielding may allow you to deal temporarily with the conflict at hand, but you haven’t really dealt with the emotions the conflict has sparked—the hurt, the resentment, and the anger. Only when you seek to confront each other in a loving way will you resolve a conflict.

### 3) What does the following verse have to say about resolving conflict?

*“Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

(EPHESIANS 4:32)

Resolving conflict means...





4) What will happen in a relationship when this principle is not applied?

Resolving conflict also requires forgiveness—giving up the right to punish the one who has wronged you. This is the miracle of the Christian life—that we can heal our relationships with others in the same way Christ healed our relationship with Him—through forgiveness.

### LOOKING AHEAD

Having talked about money, sex, God, in-laws and friends, and tooling up to fight *for* each other rather than *against*, take some time now to communicate your hopes to each other by visiting the future.

- 5) On your one-year anniversary, you're spending an evening alone and the conversation leads to a question: *What one or two things have I consistently done that make you feel loved and appreciated?* What answer would you love to hear your spouse give?
- 6) Somewhere around your fifth wedding anniversary an engaged couple asks you to join them for dinner. They ask each of you to repeat the best advice you were given when you were engaged. What do you say?
- 7) On your twenty-fifth anniversary (we'll end with this one), family and friends have gathered to celebrate the occasion with you. The group is asked to give tribute to your marriage by listing words or phrases that describe the influence your relationship has had on them. What are some of the words or phrases you hope to hear?

