

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this meditation and memorisation series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will meditate on the meaning of a Bible verse about one characteristic of a believer in Jesus Christ and then memorise it together. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

In this seventh series, the Bible teaches five decisions a Christian couple must make in order to build up their marriage. The topic of today's meditation and memorisation is: A CHRISTIAN COUPLE MUST RESOLVE CONFLICTS.

(S) **POINT 1. MEDITATION OF THE NEW BIBLE VERSE**

The new Bible verse that we will meditate and memorise is Matthew 5:23-24. We will meditate the truths in the Bible together. Let me read Matthew 5:23-24.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar . First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Conflict is normal and natural in the development of all relationships and especially in the marriage relationship. In marriage, conflicts arise because husbands and wives have different opinions, values, philosophies, and methods of doing things. These differences cause misunderstanding, irritation, anger or frustration, and as a result conflicts. Conflicts in marriage may develop or destroy your marriage, depending on your attitudes and the way you handle your conflicts. The art of resolving conflicts is a key to keeping your marriage healthy. It is also a measure of maturity and it is a part of the life-long process of two people becoming one.

(T) **First. The causes of conflicts.**

The husband and the wife are each unique. God has created each to be a unique person. And a husband and wife are quite different.

One. Natural differences.

Husbands and wives have physical, intellectual, social, emotional and personality differences. Men and women are created to be different, so that they may *complement* one another in marriage. But husbands and wives need to understand these differences, accept these differences and learn to relate to one another within these differences. Moreover, because the husband and the wife have been raised in different families and sometimes in different areas, they tend to accept as 'normal behaviour' that which they have been used to during their upbringing. Often it is these different ways of thinking, communicating and expressing feelings, which cause conflicts in marriage.

(S) Two. Spiritual differences.

Due to the fall of people into sin, all husbands and all wives have a sinful nature. Jeremiah 17:9 says, The heart is deceitful above all things." And Romans 7:18-19 says, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing." Most of the time, it is the sinful nature in husbands and wives, which causes conflicts in marriage. For example, sometimes it is the sins of *selfishness* and *self-righteousness* that cause a conflict. Philippians 2:3-4 says that the sin of selfishness is when a husband or wife do things out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, consider himself or herself to be better than the other person and seek only his or her own interests. Luke 6:41-42 describes the sin of self-righteousness. Jesus says, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

But at other times it is the difference of spiritual convictions that cause conflicts. Romans 14 says that some Christians believe that certain kinds of food should not be eaten and certain days should be kept as holy, while other Christians regard all kinds of food as good to eat and every day as the same. Husbands and wives should know and accept one another's personal convictions in areas that do not compromise the truth of the Bible.

(T) Three. Circumstances and behaviour characteristics.

All husbands and wives should ask themselves the following two questions:

First question: "Which of the following circumstances causes me to have conflicts with my marriage partner (spouse)? Fatigue? Unfulfilled needs? Financial difficulties? Busy schedule? Family background? Relatives? Lack of fellowship with Jesus Christ?"

Second question: "Which of the following behaviour characteristics causes me to have conflicts with my marriage partner? Unrealistic expectations? Unwillingness to communicate? Sarcasm or demeaning remarks? Making false assumptions? Jumping to conclusions? Inflexibility? Irritating habits? Tactlessness? Nagging?"

A good idea is to discuss your answer to these two questions with your marriage partner. Conflicts can often be resolved simply by determining what issues are creating the conflicts. Conflicts can often be resolved by taking steps to eliminate their causes or by lessening their influence.

(S) Second. Resolving conflicts.

How can marriage partners resolve their conflicts?

One. The question of initiative.

Who should take the initiative to resolve the conflict?

In Matthew 18:15, the Lord Jesus Christ himself teaches the first important principle. He teaches, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault (rebuke him), just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." Thus, whenever *your marriage partner is guilty* of some wrongdoing, *you* should take the initiative to get reconciled. Whenever your marriage partner does something wrong or commits a sin, then the Lord Jesus Christ makes *you responsible to take the initiative* to go to him or her and to show him or her his fault.

Of course, it is very important *how* you do this. In stead of immediately accusing or blaming the other, you could first ask two questions: "Did you say or do this?" And "What do you mean when you say or do this?" This gives your marriage partner a chance to explain his real intention.

In Matthew 5:23-24, the Lord Jesus Christ teaches the second important principle: He teaches, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." Thus whenever *you yourself are guilty* of some wrongdoing, *you* should still take the initiative to get reconciled. Whenever you realise that you have done something wrong or have committed a sin, then the Lord Jesus Christ still makes *you responsible to take the initiative* to go to your marriage partner, confess your wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness.

Thus, regardless who is at fault, a Christian should always take the initiative and express to the other his desire to resolve the conflict.

(T) Two. The question of response.

What is the right response when confronted with wrongdoing or sin?

The first example is from 1 Samuel 15:1-15. The prophet Samuel showed king Saul his sin, but Saul was not repentant. Instead, Saul regarded himself as self-righteous and defended his action. Then Samuel said, "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king." Also the apostle Peter warns that God resists the proud (1 Pet 5:5-6).

The second example is from 2 Samuel 12:1-13. The prophet Nathan showed king David his sin, and David was very repentant. He confessed his sin and he was immediately forgiven. David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin." (13)

Thus, when our marriage partner shows us our sin, then God expects us to admit our sin and to desire forgiveness. This is the right response when a Christian is shown his wrongdoing.

It is not only our marriage partners who show us our wrongdoing or sin, but also the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also convicts us of sin, righteousness and judgement and we should respond by confessing our sin and asking for forgiveness. Confession leads to forgiveness, joy, peace and unity in the marriage relationship. But suppression of the truth leads to frustration, resentment, hurt and disunity in the marriage relationship.

(S) Three. The question of communication.

The way in which a husband or wife shows the other marriage partner his or her wrongdoing or sin is very important. God teaches three important principles with regard to communication. Express your thoughts and feelings of anger or hurts in a self-controlled, rational and pleasant way.

The first principle is to express yourself in *a self-controlled way*. Outbursts of anger never solve a conflict. Proverbs 25:28 says, "Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control." No matter how hurt you feel, God holds you responsible for how you express your thoughts and emotions to others!

The second principle is to express yourself in *a rational way*. Irrational accusations or lies never solve a conflict. Much better is to admit to yourself, your marriage partner and to God that you are angry or frustrated. 1 Corinthians 13:6 says, "Love rejoices with the truth." And John 8:32 says, "The truth will set you free." Try to explain as calmly as possible to your marriage partner *what* made you angry or upset. Talk about *the issue* that caused the conflict and do *not* attack *the character* of your marriage partner. Discuss only *the present issue* and do *not* dig up *old or unrelated issues*, because 1 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Love keeps no record of wrongs." Try to understand one another's point of view and feelings. Also evaluate your own opinions and feelings and see if they are accurate or need improvement.

The third principle is to express yourself in *a pleasant way*. Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Therefore, take care that your words, tone and volume of voice, facial expressions and gestures do not convey rejection, but acceptance.

(T) Four. The question of reconciliation.

What is the importance of reconciliation with your marriage partner? Two consequences.

The first consequence is that *an unforgiving spirit leads to separation* from God. Matthew 6:14-15 warns that if you do not forgive your marriage partner, then God will also not forgive you! This is very serious! And in Luke 17:3-4 Jesus commands, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent', forgive him."

The second consequence is that *reconciled relationships are a testimony* that God also wants to reconcile with people. The marriage relationship reflects the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church. And reconciliation glorifies God.

(S) Five. The question of hurt feelings.

Sometimes your marriage partner cannot help to heal your hurt feelings. Then let God heal your hurt feelings. Psalm 62:8 says, "Pour out your hearts to him." Pray and talk to God about your feelings. Ask him to change your emotions and to set you free from continuous angry thoughts and frustrated feelings. Ask him to give you grace to forgive your marriage partner with your whole mind and heart and even to love your marriage partner again.

(T) Third. Practical suggestions to resolve a conflict in your marriage.

One. Take the initiative to get reconciled.

Don't wait for your partner to apologise and don't refuse to be the first to give in. Always be willing to take the initiative and resolve the conflict. Make resolving the conflict a priority. Don't let anything interfere with resolving it, even if it means cancelling a planned appointment or activity. Don't walk out of a conflict, thus killing the possibility to resolve it. Never say, "It is no use talking about this anymore. I am going out for a walk." Often the reason is that you like to indulge in your hurt feelings or you realise that you were wrong, but are too proud to apologise.

(S) Two. Speak as rationally and gently as possible.

When you discuss the conflict with your marriage partner, sit down and face one another. If the discussion gets more heated, lower your voices and avoid shouting at one another.

(T) Three. Discuss the issue that caused the conflict, not the character of the other.

Make an effort to define the issue so that both of you understand what the conflict is about. Don't attack the person. Rather attack the issue that caused the conflict. Never say to your marriage partner, "You *always* do this!" or "You *never* do that!" Accusing the other to be selfish or lazy or untidy, etc. is character assassination: you attack your partner's character instead of attacking the issue that caused the conflict! God expects you to hate sin, but not the sinner.

(S) Four. Be willing to forgive and to forget.

Don't keep bringing up the issue that caused the conflict and thus never allowing the conflict to end.

(T) Five. Involve a respected and trusted counsellor.

Sometimes it is very helpful to seek counsel from a church leader or a good friend, whom you respect and can trust. Another person is often more objective.

(S) POINT 2. MEMORISATION OF THE NEW BIBLE VERSE

Write the Bible verse on a card or in a notebook. The topic today is "To resolve conflicts" and the reference is Matthew 5:23-24. Let us memorise the Bible verse together. Then let us take turns to say that part of the verse alone without looking at the Bible or notebook.

(T+S) To resolve conflicts: Matthew 5:23-24. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar.

- (T) To resolve conflicts: Matthew 5:23-24. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar.
- (T+S) To resolve conflicts: Matthew 5:23-24. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar.
- (S) To resolve conflicts: Matthew 5:23-24. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar.
- (T+S) To resolve conflicts: Matthew 5:23-24. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23-24.
- (T) To resolve conflicts: Matthew 5:23-24. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23-24.

(S) **POINT 3. REVIEW OF THE LAST BIBLE VERSES YOU HAVE MEMORISED**

Let us review the last 5 Bible verses that we have memorised without looking at our notebooks.
Series “Christian preparation for marriage”, verses 4-5 and series “Christian marriage”, verses 1-3.

- (T) Proper timing: Ecclesiastes 8:5-6. The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter. Ecclesiastes 8:5-6.
- (S) Right priorities: Matthew 6:33. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33.
- (T) To leave and to cleave: Genesis 2:24. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:24.
- (S) To love and to lead: Ephesians 5:23,25. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. Ephesians 5:23,25.
- (T) To love and to submit: Titus 2:4-5. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Titus 2:4-5.

(S) **POINT 4. ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Daily review the last five memorised Bible verses once every day for 5 weeks.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and build Christ’s Church” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.