



## Effective Conflict Resolution (Turning Your Battles Into Blessings)

By Bob Baker  
Director, Colorado Marriage Project

An Observation: In a normal marriage, there are at least three words that seem to characterize the area of conflict:

1. Inevitable--When two people set out on the journey of a lifetime together, conflict is inevitable. However, a couple can either allow their conflicts to seriously damage (and possibly destroy) their relationship, or they can turn them into opportunities for actually strengthening and energizing their relationship.

2. Resolvable--The application of Biblical principles in the conflict-resolution process makes virtually all conflict capable of resolution.

3. Redemptive--The Biblical approach to conflict resolution, if correctly applied, actually turns a possible disaster into a special opportunity for personal growth which can in fact redeem a failing marriage.

A. A couple who sets out to improve their conflict-resolution skills needs to focus on both their heart attitude and their skills in dealing with conflict. One without the other is a sure path to frustration and very slow progress.

***Matt 12:34:*** "...For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."

B. The proper heart condition for conflict resolution is succinctly stated in Phil. 2:3-4:

*"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus..."*

C. The root of the problem is summed up in *James 4:1-3:*  
*"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."*

D. Extensive research done by Dr. Scott Stanley and his associates at the University of Denver has taught us that there are four specific ways to “self-destruct” (my words) the conflict resolution process. These four warning signs are:

**Withdrawal**  
**Invalidation**  
**Negative Interpretation**  
**Escalation**

E. It is important that couples understand the meaning of these words and then do some honest self-examination of whether these patterns are present.

**W**-ithdrawal—is the inability or unwillingness to get into or stick with important discussions.

**I**-nvalidation--is the intentional discounting or putdown of the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other party ("What planet are you from?")

**N**-egative interpretation--occurs when a marriage partner consistently believes that the motives of the other party are more negative than they really are. It usually involves perception which is actually worse than reality and interpreting your mate's behavior in the worst possible light ("Guilty until proven innocent.")

**E**-scalation—is characterized by partners responding to each other negatively back and forth, each time ratcheting up the emotion--until it becomes openly hostile and hurtful; it invariably leads to heightened anger, frustration, and hurt.

F. Although diagnosis is only the first step, a couple who can identify their tendency to fall into one or more of these negative conflict resolution patterns is well on the way to making change. Self-awareness often leads to a huge breakthrough for many couples who have been going “around the barn” on the same issues for many years.

G. For more information on this important topic, we highly recommend “[A Lasting Promise--A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage](#),” By Scott Stanley and others.

H. Your goal is to convert:

1. Withdrawal into Engagement
2. Invalidation into Affirmation
3. Negative Interpretation into Merciful Understanding
4. Escalation into Calming of the Storm