

# FORTIFIED MARRIAGES

Fortifying Marriages to Strengthen Families, Churches and the Community



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MA-MFT

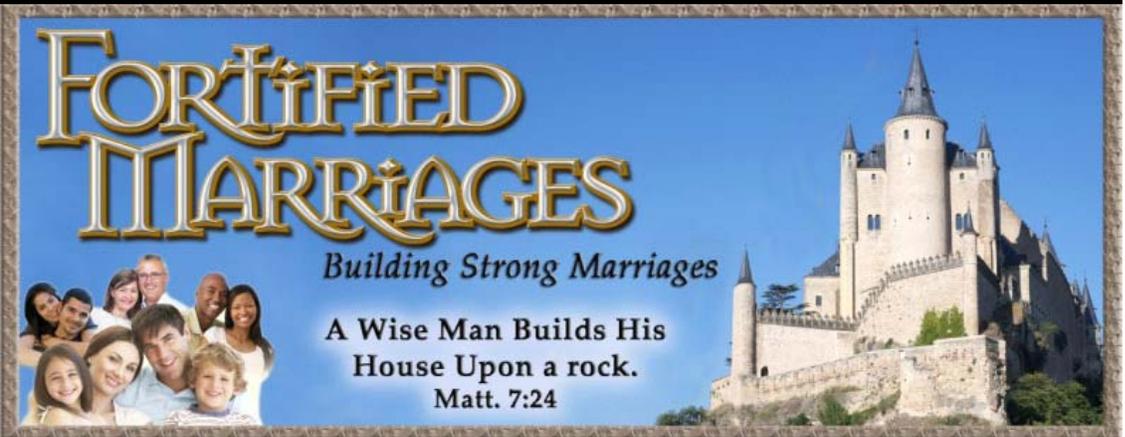
Visit our website

[www.fortifiedmarriages.com](http://www.fortifiedmarriages.com)

to find out more about the ministry and how you can get involved.

The website also has a great deal of marriage resources and links to other marriage organizations available.

Donations are tax-deductible and make the ministry to couples locally and internationally possible.



## Healthy Conflict Resolution

Researcher Judith Wallerstein stated that a conflict free marriage is an oxymoron. Conflict *will* happen in marriage, and although many people think of conflict as something bad, to be avoided, it really is a natural part of marriage. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines conflict in terms of battles or flights, and yet another dictionary defines it as; “to come into collision or disagreement; be contradictory, at variance, or in opposition; clash.” Simply stated, conflict occurs when there are divergent views, wants, or desires, but it does not have to result in arguments or battles. Conflict in marriage may be inevitable, but unfortunately, many couples allow conflict to damage rather than build up their relationship.

What causes conflict in marriage? Differences are a major cause; gender, personality, family of origin, needs - each couple must contend with many differences. Additionally; expectations, ego, selfishness and problems from the past will bring about marital conflict. Finally, sin of one or both spouses may cause conflict in the marriage. This means that there are many possibilities for conflict! Most couples will have the some sort of conflict almost on a daily basis, but conflict is not a bad thing and it doesn't mean that the marriage is in trouble. Handled correctly, conflict actually enhances and matures the marriage. Think of Proverbs 27:17; to paraphrase, ‘as iron sharpens iron, so a husband and wife sharpen each other.’ Working through their differences will help a couple grow individually and together in their relationship.

Healthy conflict resolution means that a couple learns to work together through their differences. They focus on the issue and not each other and they seek to find solutions that work for both husband and wife. Couples should *collaborate*; jointly work together in unity to meet the challenges they will face in life. Using healthy communication tools



helps, but it begins with an attitude that one's spouse is not the enemy, but a teammate. Ephesians 4:29 provides a guideline for communication during conflict; “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Healthy communication is important to working through conflict and helps keep the focus on the problem and not each other. There are five ways to resolve conflict: 1) work out a compromise, 2) die to self and allow one's spouse to have his or her way, 3) pray and wait for God's guidance, 4) maintain healthy boundaries and allow God to work in a situation, or 5) seek mediation. Working together, a couple can work through conflict and grow in their relationship.

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## Destructive Conflict

Tom and Pat argued about everything; household chores, parenting, career, sex, money, family vacations, and the way they communicated. The conflict raged as an ongoing war of words between the two of them; that is until Tom shut down and refused to talk which infuriated Pat even more. In counseling, this frustrated couple, displayed a pattern of communication that escalated very quickly into a full-scale arguments leading to a series of unresolved problems. They were headed for separation and possibly divorce because they could not resolve any of the many problems that continued to build in their marriage. Viewing a diagram of how their arguments escalated woke them up to the fact that they needed to change the way they communicated. Once they began communicating in more healthy ways, they were able to begin working through the problems they had. A key was seeing each other as a partner to work with rather than an enemy to defeat. It still took a while to get to a point where conflicts didn't escalate as much, but over time they were able to incorporate communication tools and begin resolving their problems.



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## The Importance of Validation

Validating one's spouse is critical to positive resolution of conflict. It is an attitude more than a "technique" because it affirms another person's value even in the midst of conflict. Researcher Sue Johnson wrote an excellent definition of validation: "Communicating that another's emotions and responses are legitimate and understandable." It isn't a matter of who is right or wrong; each person has a view and when that view is validated as legitimate and understandable for that person, it will affirm his or her value and will diffuse the tension in the conflict. It helps keep the focus on the issue rather than each other.

Validating phrases may be; 'I can see how you would feel that way,' 'that must be painful for you,' 'it makes sense that you would feel...,' or 'I can understand that...'. Validate your spouse's feelings and responses, it can make a difference in your communication and help you work through the conflict you experience.

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## Action Point: What are *you* going to do?

Does conflict in your marriage help move you toward oneness? Or does it tend to damage your relationship through hurtful arguments? All couples; unless there is virtually no relationship, *will* have conflict. The question is, how will you handle the conflict?

You can learn to resolve conflict in ways that will strengthen your relationship, but it begins with your attitude. Do you think of your spouse as the enemy? Or as the partner you love so much? Incorporate Ephesians 4:29 into your daily communication and work together as a team to resolve conflict and meet the challenges you face together.



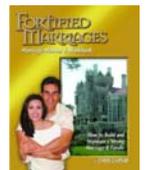
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## Resources Available at [www.fortifiedmarriages.com](http://www.fortifiedmarriages.com)

- Go to the *Resources Available* page to find a lot of great resources, including resources and ideas to help spark romance.
- Communication resources are available also.
- Click "Manual" to learn about the Fortified Marriages manual and workbook.
- Articles and information are also available to learn more about God's design for marriage.



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*Fortified Marriages Ministry* is a 501(c)3, non-profit organization seeking to build strong marriages to withstand the storms that will come. Please consider partnering with us to affect marriages and help couples leave a Godly legacy. Ministry partners may donate to the cause of building strong marriages, become monthly contributors, pray regularly for the ministry, or by letting others know about the ministry. More information is available at <http://www.fortifiedmarriages.com/page.php?22>.