

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN MARRIAGE

The 9 Essential Techniques

*A Biblical, Psychological, and Practical Guide
for Every Married Couple*

LLOYD ALLEN

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How to Use This Guide

FOR COUPLES

This guide was written for both of you. Every module addresses one specific technique for resolving conflict in a way that heals rather than harms. Read each one as an invitation to grow together – not as a scorecard for what has gone wrong.

FOR INDIVIDUALS

If you are working through this alone, each module still applies. You cannot control how your spouse handles conflict – but you can change what you bring to it. One person applying these techniques consistently will shift the dynamic of the entire marriage.

THE SEQUENCE MATTERS

The 9 techniques are ordered intentionally. Someone must go first, someone must take responsibility, someone must listen – and all of that must happen before genuine resolution is possible. Work through them in order.

PAGE 2 OF EACH MODULE

Page 2 contains the Biological & Psychological explanation and the Theological grounding. Read them. Understanding why a technique works transforms how you apply it. A person who understands will sustain the change. A person who merely knows will forget.

THE REFLECTION PROMPT

Every second page ends with a reflection question. Do not skip it. Write your answer. The question is designed to move the content from your head into your marriage.

The Logic of the Sequence

Conflict resolution is not a bag of random tricks. It is a sequence — each technique building on the one before it. Start with initiative. Everything else follows.

STAGE	TECHNIQUE	SCRIPTURE	WHAT IT ACCOMPLISHES
Initiative	Make the First Move	<i>Matthew 5:23-24</i>	Someone takes the courageous step
Humility	Take Responsibility	<i>James 4:1</i>	Pride gives way to ownership
Understanding	Listen Before You Speak	<i>James 1:19</i>	The other person feels truly heard
Wisdom	Speak Truth in Love	<i>Ephesians 4:29</i>	Words heal instead of wound
Restoration	Apology and Forgiveness	<i>Ephesians 4:32</i>	The rupture is fully repaired
Focus	Solution-Focused Approach	<i>2 Corinthians 5:18</i>	Reconciliation becomes the goal
Honor	Never Shame — Always Honor	<i>Proverbs 15:1</i>	Dignity is protected every time
Prayer	Pray Together About It	<i>James 1:5</i>	God enters the conversation
Culture	Build a Culture of Resolution	<i>John 13:35</i>	The whole marriage changes

MODULE 1

MAKE THE FIRST MOVE

The Courage That Changes Everything

“Leave your offering there before the altar and go — first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

— **Matthew 5:23–24**

Reconciliation is more important than worship. God Himself says leave your offering and fix it first — no spiritual activity is more urgent than a broken relationship. Conflicts are never resolved accidentally. They do not fix themselves. Someone has to go first. Peacemaking is not avoiding the problem or appeasing the person. It is the courage to walk toward the fire instead of away from it.

Reconciliation with your spouse is a higher priority than religious activity

Conflicts never resolve themselves — someone must take the initiative

Peacemaking is not conflict avoidance — it is deliberate, courageous engagement

When emotions peak, pause the conversation — not permanently, but strategically

Agree in advance: we will return to it when we can both hear each other

MODULE 1 — MAKE THE FIRST MOVE

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

When conflict erupts, the brain's amygdala triggers a fight-or-flight response that floods the body with cortisol and adrenaline — shutting down the prefrontal cortex, the seat of reason and empathy. In this state, neither person can actually hear the other. The person who initiates repair breaks the neurological loop. Gottman's research confirms that the single most predictive behavior in lasting marriages is the willingness to make repair attempts — early, consistently, and before pride has time to calcify.

THEOLOGICAL

God's instruction to leave the offering and go first reveals His understanding of human nature — that pride will always find a reason to delay. Reconciliation is an act of obedience before it is an act of emotion. The peacemaker is called blessed not because peacemaking is easy, but because it images the character of a God who made the first move toward humanity long before humanity was ready to respond.

“What does this technique reveal about how we handle conflict — and what is one thing I will apply differently this week?”

MODULE 2

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR PART

Humility Is the Most Powerful Tool in the Room

“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?” – James 4:1 – “Through pride comes nothing but strife.”

— Proverbs 13:10

The first question in any conflict is not “What did they do?” It is “What is my fault?” Ninety-five percent of conflicts can be resolved when both people possess genuine humility. Pride is the primary cause of conflict – not money, not sex, not in-laws. Pride. The person who goes first in taking responsibility almost always wins the reconciliation. Humility is not weakness. It is the most disarming force in any argument.

Begin every conflict conversation with the question: “What is my fault in this?”

Put away pride – the ego trap will destroy what humility could have saved

Exercise humility even when you believe you are mostly in the right

Taking responsibility is not surrender – it is the fastest route to resolution

The person who humbles themselves first sets the tone for the entire conversation

MODULE 2 — TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR PART

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

Pride activates the same neural reward circuits as physical pleasure — making it genuinely difficult to relinquish. When a person defends their position under threat, the brain treats it as a survival situation. Humility, by contrast, disarms the threat response in both people simultaneously. Research in social psychology consistently shows that the person who takes partial responsibility first — even in situations where they feel mostly wronged — dramatically increases the probability that the other person will follow. Humility is neurologically contagious.

THEOLOGICAL

James locates the origin of every conflict not in circumstances but in the interior — in desires, appetites, and pride that have not been surrendered to God. The invitation is not merely to be a nicer person in an argument. It is to ask God to search your heart before you open your mouth. Ezekiel 36:26 promises a new heart — and the willingness to take responsibility is one of the clearest signs that the new heart is operating.

“What does this technique reveal about how we handle conflict — and what is one thing I will apply differently this week?”

MODULE 3

LISTEN BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Understanding Must Come Before Resolution

“Everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

— James 1:19

You cannot resolve what you do not understand. Most people in conflict are not listening — they are waiting for their turn to speak. The real meaning in any argument is almost never in the words being said. It lives in the emotion behind the words — the fear, the hurt, the unmet need driving the volume. The key to resolving conflict is not finding the right words to say. It is the willingness to receive theirs first.

Listen to the emotion behind the words — the real issue is rarely the presenting issue

Know what hurt them that caused them to hurt you — start there, not with your own grievance

Seek more to understand than to be understood — this is the posture that opens doors

You show someone you love them by giving them your full, undivided attention

Never answer before you have the full story — premature responses inflame rather than resolve

MODULE 3 — LISTEN BEFORE YOU SPEAK

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

The human brain processes emotional pain in the same region as physical pain — the anterior cingulate cortex. When a person feels unheard, that pain is real and physiological. Conversely, feeling genuinely heard activates the brain's reward system and lowers cortisol. This is why active listening is not simply a courtesy — it is a neurological intervention. A spouse who truly listens is literally regulating their partner's nervous system, creating the biological conditions necessary for productive conversation.

THEOLOGICAL

Scripture places listening above speaking in nearly every passage on human relationships. God Himself is described throughout the Psalms as the One who hears — and being heard by God is presented as one of the most intimate expressions of His love. A husband or wife who listens well is practicing the same sacred attentiveness. Proverbs 18:13 calls answering before hearing both foolish and shameful — strong language that signals just how seriously God views the discipline of listening before speaking.

“What does this technique reveal about how we handle conflict — and what is one thing I will apply differently this week?”

MODULE 4

SPEAK TRUTH IN LOVE — ATTACK THE PROBLEM

Win the Person, Not the Argument

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification.”

— **Ephesians 4:29**

You are never persuasive when you are abrasive. You never get your point across by being cross. If you say it offensively, it will be received defensively. Truth without love is resisted. Truth with love is received. The goal of every hard conversation is not to score points — it is to reach the person sitting across from you. Choose your words accordingly.

Replace “You” statements with “I” statements — “I feel,” “I need,” “I am hurt when”

No one can deny how you feel — it cannot be argued with or dismissed

Avoid blanket statements like always and never — rarely accurate, always escalating

Do not raise your voice — improve your argument instead

Reckless words pierce like a sword — foolish words wound; wise words heal

MODULE 4 — SPEAK TRUTH IN LOVE — ATTACK THE PROBLEM

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

Language activates the brain's threat detection system with the same speed as physical danger. A harsh word, a contemptuous tone, or a "you always" accusation immediately triggers defensiveness — releasing the same stress hormones as a physical threat. Gottman's Four Horsemen — criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling — are all forms of attacking the person rather than the problem. Contempt alone is the single strongest predictor of divorce. Choosing words carefully is not politeness. It is conflict science.

THEOLOGICAL

Ephesians 4:29 does not merely prohibit harmful words — it issues a positive command: let your words build up, give grace, and meet the need of the moment. Scripture consistently frames the tongue as a matter of spiritual formation, not just social skill. Proverbs 12:18 identifies reckless words as weapons and wise words as medicine. The standard is not just do no harm. It is actively heal. Every word spoken in conflict is either a tool of restoration or a tool of destruction. There is no neutral ground.

“What does this technique reveal about how we handle conflict — and what is one thing I will apply differently this week?”

MODULE 5

GIVE A GENUINE APOLOGY AND CHOOSE FORGIVENESS

Both Sides of the Same Covenant Coin

“Forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

— Ephesians 4:32

A ruptured relationship rarely heals without a genuine apology — and an apology without all five components is incomplete. Apology is not weakness. It is the acknowledgment that the relationship matters more than your position. On the other side, forgiveness is not a feeling. It is a covenant decision — made before the emotion arrives. Holding a grudge blocks your relationship with God, blocks your prayers, and blocks your own happiness.

Express regret — name specifically what you are apologizing for, and mean it

Take full responsibility — no deflecting, no “but if you hadn’t...”

Make restitution — ask “Is there something I can do to make this right?”

Change your behavior — godly sorrow produces real, visible repentance

Request forgiveness — some people need to hear those exact words to feel complete

MODULE 5 — GIVE A GENUINE APOLOGY AND CHOOSE FORGIVENESS

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

Research identifies five distinct apology languages — and a person who does not receive an apology in their primary language will often not register that one was given at all. Physiologically, a genuine apology lowers cortisol in the recipient, reduces blood pressure, and restores the sense of relational safety. Forgiveness — independently of the offender — has been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, and chronic stress in the person who forgives. Forgiveness is not just moral. It is medical.

THEOLOGICAL

The model for both apology and forgiveness in Scripture is God Himself. David’s confession in Psalm 51 demonstrates all five components of a genuine apology — expressed specifically and without excuse. God’s forgiveness of His people in Christ is equally complete, unconditional, and costly. When a spouse apologizes genuinely and forgives completely, they are not merely being reasonable — they are imaging the character of God within the covenant of marriage.

“What does this technique reveal about how we handle conflict — and what is one thing I will apply differently this week?”

MODULE 6

TAKE A SOLUTION-FOCUSED APPROACH

The Ministry of Reconciliation Starts at Home

“God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.”

— 2 Corinthians 5:18

The question in conflict is not “Who was right?” The question is “Can we repair this?” Most couples get this backwards — they fight to establish fault when they should be building a path back to each other. A solution-focused approach does not ignore what went wrong. It simply refuses to let what went wrong become more important than what can be made right. Love is like a tender plant — easily damaged when not treated with consistent, intentional care.

Ask your spouse: Can I repair it when you get upset? Will you let me?

Repair as you go — do not let small wounds become permanent walls

Focus on healing the relationship, not winning the argument

Take a restorative approach — the goal is wholeness, not victory

Some are trapped by ego — unwilling to repair because they refuse to admit they need to

MODULE 6 — TAKE A SOLUTION-FOCUSED APPROACH

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

The brain's negativity bias means that negative relational experiences are encoded more deeply and retrieved more easily than positive ones. This is why unresolved conflict compounds — each new argument activates the memory of every previous unresolved one. Gottman's research found that stable marriages maintain a ratio of at least five positive interactions for every negative one. A solution-focused approach intentionally builds positive repair experiences that counteract the brain's natural tendency to catastrophize conflict.

THEOLOGICAL

The ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5:18 is not assigned only to pastors and counselors — it is given to every believer. The married couple is the primary unit in which this ministry is lived out. To pursue reconciliation in marriage is to participate in the redemptive mission of God — who did not focus on what humanity did wrong, but built a costly path back to relationship. Every couple that repairs what is broken is preaching the gospel to each other.

“What does this technique reveal about how we handle conflict — and what is one thing I will apply differently this week?”

MODULE 7

NEVER SHAME — ALWAYS HONOR

Dignity Intact, Every Time

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

— **Proverbs 15:1**

Never shame your spouse — publicly, privately, or in front of your children. The goal of every hard conversation is to walk out of it with the other person’s dignity completely intact. You converse not to condemn but to understand. Without honor, there is no safety. Without safety, there is no openness. Without openness, there is no real resolution — only temporary ceasefire.

Never shame your spouse in public, in private, or in front of your children

Remember you are not enemies — you are partners navigating a shared problem

Respect each other’s differences — seek harmony in diversity, not uniformity

Emotional intelligence is not optional in marriage — it determines outcomes

Never hold a grudge or keep malice — what you carry quietly will poison everything

MODULE 7 — NEVER SHAME — ALWAYS HONOR

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

Shame activates the brain's social pain network — the same neural circuitry that processes physical injury. Chronic relational shame literally rewires the brain over time, increasing anxiety, reducing self-worth, and creating hypervigilance in the shamed person. A spouse who regularly experiences shame in conflict will eventually disengage emotionally — not because they stopped caring, but because the nervous system cannot sustain the repeated threat. Honor creates felt safety — and felt safety is the neurological prerequisite for intimacy, vulnerability, and genuine connection.

THEOLOGICAL

Proverbs consistently frames the tongue as a matter of life and death — not metaphorically but spiritually. Words spoken in anger or contempt carry a spiritual weight that outlasts the argument. The married couple stands in a unique covenant position — they have the greatest power to wound each other and the greatest power to heal each other. Choosing honor in conflict is not just good communication. It is a sacred decision to treat your spouse as what Scripture says they are: an image-bearer of God and your co-heir of grace.

“What does this technique reveal about how we handle conflict — and what is one thing I will apply differently this week?”

MODULE 8

PRAY TOGETHER ABOUT IT

What Humility Before God Does to a Room

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously to all without reproach.”

— James 1:5

No conflict resolution technique is more consistently underused in Christian marriage than this one. It is nearly impossible to remain in a posture of pride, contempt, or bitterness while genuinely praying with your spouse. Something shifts in the spiritual atmosphere when two people who are in conflict humble themselves before God together. Prayer reorients both people toward what matters most: the covenant, the relationship, and the God who ordained it.

If you cannot pray together about it, you are not yet ready to resolve it

Prayer is not the last resort — it is the first move

Praying together reorients both people from their position to their covenant

Ask God for wisdom, not for vindication — the request itself changes your posture

Genuine prayer together is one of the most intimate acts a couple can share

MODULE 8 — PRAY TOGETHER ABOUT IT

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

Research on shared religious practice in marriage consistently demonstrates that couples who pray together report higher marital satisfaction, lower rates of conflict escalation, and significantly higher rates of forgiveness. Physiologically, prayer activates the parasympathetic nervous system — the body's rest-and-digest state — reducing cortisol and calming the fight-or-flight response. It is neurologically difficult to pray with someone and remain in a state of contempt toward them simultaneously.

THEOLOGICAL

James 1:5 offers one of the most unconditional promises in Scripture — ask for wisdom and God will give it generously, without finding fault. This promise applies directly to the married couple sitting in a hard conversation they do not know how to finish. Prayer in conflict is not a religious formality. It is an act of radical dependence on the only One who has already resolved every rupture that ever existed.

“What does this technique reveal about how we handle conflict — and what is one thing I will apply differently this week?”

MODULE 9

BUILD A CULTURE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Agreements and Habits – Not Just Skills

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples – that you love one another.”

– John 13:35

The deepest level of conflict resolution is not a technique. It is a culture – a set of agreements, habits, and shared values that a couple builds intentionally so that when conflict comes, it lands in prepared soil. A couple with a culture of resolution does not handle conflict perfectly. But they handle it consistently – with a shared language, a shared commitment, and a shared God to return to when things get hard.

Establish ground rules before the next argument – not during it

Agree: we do not walk out, raise voices, bring up the past, or involve the children

Communicate openly – your spouse is not a mind reader; assumptions destroy marriages

Never make decisions based on assumptions – always get the facts first

The goal is not a marriage without conflict – it is a marriage where conflict produces growth

MODULE 9 — BUILD A CULTURE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

Habits are formed through consistent repetition that creates neural pathways in the brain — and conflict habits are no exception. Couples who repeatedly handle conflict destructively literally wire their brains for destructive patterns. The reverse is equally true: couples who consistently practice healthy conflict resolution build neural pathways that make constructive responses increasingly automatic over time. Culture change in a marriage is the accumulation of repeated small decisions — each one reinforcing or dismantling the patterns that will determine the quality of the marriage for decades.

THEOLOGICAL

John 13:35 places love for one another at the center of Christian witness — and the marriage covenant is the primary arena in which that love is tested and proven. A couple that has built a culture of resolution is not simply functional. They are a testimony — demonstrating to their children, their community, and their world that the gospel is livable in practice, even in the hardest conversations, even after the worst failures, even when it costs something real to stay and repair.

“What does this technique reveal about how we handle conflict — and what is one thing I will apply differently this week?”

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