



Welcome back to the Great Date Night!

We're on our third month of fun dates, and great conversations, and we've got two more to go after this! We've even included some additional worksheets in case you and your spouse want to keep the discussion going in-between great dates!

As usual, take advantage of our inexpensive childcare if you have small children, you can register and choose your childcare time and location online at www.capechristian.com/greatdates

Please print the discussion guide on the next page and take it with you on your date. You can go out to dinner, find a shady spot at the park, or just stay in for a night of homemade dessert and some alone time. Wherever you go, you can use the following page as your evening's conversational guide.

Oh yeah, and don't forget to post pictures and like/share the church's facebook page at www.facebook.com/capechristian

Have a Great Date!

Fighting For Relationship

You may not have a boxing ring or a marriage referee in your house, but chances are you do have your fair share of conflicts. Most couples don't have a problem getting into arguments, but they do have difficulty resolving their disagreements and coming out stronger on the other side. Conflict was designed by God to refine us, but all too often we fight against our spouse rather than fighting together for a better outcome and a stronger relationship.

Use this discussion guide to navigate these issues on your date tonight. Follow Up This Discussion in the weeks to come with the "Fighting Fair In Marriage" worksheets on the following pages.

A good way to deal with conflict is to seek PEACE

Pause

Empathize

Avoid Generalizations

Confess Your Part

Engage Gently

Discuss: Which of these five parts of the PEACE plan do you think you do well? Which do you think you could be better at?

In the heat of the moment we often want to get our point across, make sure our spouse knows exactly what's on our mind, and often times, win an argument. By practicing the PEACE method, we'll make sure that

we're fighting for a better relationship with our spouse, not just to win an argument.

Discuss: Think about an argument you and your spouse had when you were dating or first married that seems silly or trivial now. Why did it seem so major then and so minor now?

Discuss: When was the last time you and your spouse had an argument? If you can discuss it without getting angry or emotional now, what was it about, and what was the outcome?

Discuss: What are some "cheap shots" that can take a conflict with your spouse in the wrong direction? Focus on yourself here. What are the things you tend to do or say in moments of conflict that end up making the situation worse?

Wrap Up: The truth is, conflict isn't bad in and of itself. In fact, when handled correctly, conflict can actually strengthen a relationship and bring a couple closer together. The determining factor often boils down to whether we're fighting for a better relationship or fighting to win an argument! The outcomes of our conflicts are important, too, because we did vow, "till do death do us part," and I'm sure all of us would rather see that happen later rather than sooner!

Work Sheets: Please use the following three work sheets over the next few weeks to follow up your discussion from tonight's date!

Worksheets - Fighting Fair In Marriage...

To often in our marriages we fight to be right instead of fighting for a better relationship with our spouse. During conflict we often see our spouse as an enemy to be defeated instead of a mate to be loved, even when disagreements arise. To help move from enemies to loving mates couples need to establish some ground rules. We recommend...

Creating a list of words or phrases that can't be used because they are "below the belt", things like:

“always,” “never,” “forever,” or “you’re just like your mom.”

Setting boundaries for conflict, agreeing that the following are "out of bounds"

- Attacking your spouse’s character rather than address an issue.
- Generalizing or over-inflating a complaint.
- Allowing frustration to build so that it turns into resentment.
- "Checking out" and put up emotional barriers between you and your spouse.
- Using FOG (fear, obligation, or guilt) as a manipulative tactic.
- Allowing arguments to continue along a downward spiral.
- Belittling your spouse, even with humor.

Discuss the following...

Do you or your spouse find yourselves using the words on the "below the belt" list? If so, which ones cause your conflicts to deteriorate the most?

Which of the things on this list do you and spouse struggle with the most?

Simply playing defense by identifying the negative things to avoid in conflict isn't enough, we also need to have an offensive game plan to build a stronger marriage through healthy conflict.

A great offensive strategy is the
PEACE plan...

Pause - Empathize - Avoid generalizations
- Confess your part - Engage gently

Let's go to the chalkboard and break it down...

Pause:

Take some time before confrontations.

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom. -Viktor Frankle

In this space you should take time to...

- **Cool down** and detox from your anger.
- **Pray**- "God, help me to see my spouse through your eyes. Help me to see my own sin for what it is. Forgive me and cleanse my mind and heart. Help me distinguish what I can accept and what I must confront and grant me your love and discernment in the confrontation."
- **See the margin as "sacred space"** where God can do a great work. Martin Buber wrote about the movement from an "I-It" relationship to an "I-Thou" relationship. In the "I-It" relationship, I treat you as a means to an end. You are to meet my needs. But in the "I-Thou" relationship I recognize that you and I are both made in the image of God and so is every other person on the planet. And when genuine love is expressed in a relationship, God's presence is manifest.

Discuss the following...

When conflict arises, how quickly do you and your spouse respond? What is usually the outcome?

Empathize:

If we're defensive with our spouse, choosing to focus on justifying ourselves first, we won't be receptive to what they are actually saying to us. Our goal should be to disarm your spouse and reassure them by avoiding any adversarial posture or tone. We seldom receive counsel from someone who we feel doesn't understand us or have our best interests in mind. Aristotle once wrote, "Anybody can become angry - that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way...that is not easy." You can be critical and still be constructive rather than destructive.

How can we create the best environment for conflict? By examining our...

Posture - are you on a higher plane? Or are you humble?

Perspective - Do you see your spouse through love or judgment?

Intent - Is your aim reconciliation and growth or to prove a point or make them suffer?

Take a moment to discuss the environment that exists when you and your spouse experience conflict in your relationship.

To be continued in April's date instructions...