

## Selfless Marriage – August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024 - Part 3: Conflict

**Corporate Prayer:** Announce first, song, pray after song for offering.

### 1. Life on Mission - "each one, reach one"

- For 1000 ppl to engage their life on mission through actively reaching ONE PERSON

### 2. Family Camp 1

- For camp staff, volunteers, campers - belonging, safety, fun, to know & love Jesus!

### 3. PRAISE God for answering prayer for campers, and for us, and those in our region!

- **Answered Prayer!** The part we prayed for last week, we got it, and its working!

Good Morning and Welcome here this morning, if you are visiting here we are happy that you can join us! My name is Martin Gunter and I am one of the Pastors here Southland Church and today we are going to finish our small 3 part series on Marriage this morning.

**Recap:** Last week we talked about some common marriage struggles and identified that a selfish marriage will lead us to have issues with **feeling different from your spouse, unmet expectations** which will lead us to **blaming**, where you feel that most things are your spouse' fault. We also then looked at what we can do to grow out of these symptoms of a selfish marriage and start walking towards a selfless one by **not taking the easy way out, praying continually** for your spouse, **practice listening** and finally **acting in love** towards them. This week we are wrapping it up by talking about one of the biggest challenges we face in all our marriages and in our relationships to various degrees and that we all need to deal with at one stage or another, but I want to do it in context of living a Selfless Marriage and how we navigate CONFLICT!

Call it conflict, call it quarreling, call it strong disagreements, call it friction, call it squabbles, call it fighting... But conflict is inevitable in marriage and in relationships of all kinds. The question really comes down to what do we do with conflict when we are in it and as a Christian, is it OK to have conflict? Before we continue on though, I have a very rare picture to show you all this morning. This was taken recently to my understanding, and we have proof of a husband that just won an argument against his wife and its him relaxing after the conflict they had... Take a look!!

**A. What is Conflict?** Have anyone here before, and you do not have to raise your hands for this one... But have any of you had success at work, just for it to be not feel like success because you are preoccupied with an argument you and your spouse had, or gone on vacation where its suppose to be a time of relaxation and fun, just for it to be turned upside down because of all the friction and squabbles on the trip? Its HARD! Its hard because we don't know what to do when we have conflict and how to respond and I believe its because we don't really understand what conflict is... We mostly picture someone yelling or arguing very loudly, but this is not always the case, and that is only for some people. For others it can also be someone who just shuts off, and is quiet and

either walks away or ignores the other person. And it makes sense why we see such a wide range of approaches to conflict because some of us saw lots of conflict as a kid and your parents got a divorce and now you avoid it!! Or maybe you saw conflict and you like it, because it gets things done and now that is all you want to do. Either way, **conflict is not really the issue, the issue is unresolved conflict.** Conflict will always reveal that there is something that you are not in unity over or there is a misunderstanding or unmet expectation, and these will cause us to have conflict through arguing or even blaming as we talked about last week. The real issue then comes down to if we are dealing with them or do they remain unresolved? Let me put it in another way for you... We will have conflict, it comes down to if we are equipped to deal with it or not, and let me say as an expert on conflict in my relationship... unresolved conflict eats away at the unity in your marriage, its awful, and on the flip side, resolved conflict, is life giving in your marriage because it brings unity and peace, because you just accomplish something hard and placed your spouse value above the conflict issue. **Conflict is not about who has the upper hand, or who won, its about how do I please God and bring glory to God through the conflict!** We often then make the mistake where I am trying to win in the argument or in conflict instead of trying to let the relationship win in the argument. When its all about me in a selfish marriage and I am fighting for number 1, for me to win, we cause division in our relationships. **Mark 3:24-25 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.**

Conflict has the capacity to cause much division if we do not deal with it or we ignore it. **Conflict ignored will never go away!!** Conflict ignored will continue to grow over time and it will simply become worse and a bigger issue to deal with! Thankfully we serve a good God, a God who has equipped us through His scripture on how we can deal with conflict and in turn we can use it as an opportunity! I say opportunity because we always have people watching us, whether its our kids at home, our work place, family, friends when we hang out. We have an opportunity to reflect how we show God's grace and love and forgiveness during moments of conflict. **2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,** We are not fighting the person in front of us when we are in conflict with them! We are fighting a spiritual war and we have weapons to fight with but we have to take our thoughts captive to obey Christ as we engage in conflict... More on that in a bit... I think its important for us to look at how we identify with conflict in our lives before I show you how we can respond to them.

**B. Identifying conflict in your life.** There are 5 basic types of conflict that we see in people and we will all fall under one or more of these types depending on what is at stake and what the topic is, but most of us will mainly fall under one type as a knee jerk reaction of what your default type of conflict is. Now we need a basic issue of conflict to deal with this morning so that I can give you some examples on what to do, so I am using the same example I use in the marriage seminar because I like it and I have the mic. But let's say me and Andrea are both home, and we want to eat a mango, but we only have 1 mango left it's the end of the season so there are no more to go and buy, what do we do? CONFLICT! We will look at 5 different ways conflict can play out and we are starting with the unhealthiest form of conflict first and we will work our way up to a healthy way of dealing with it.

- 1. Circumventing – Lose / Lose – Avoid the mango:** This is the unhealthiest one of all the conflict types simply because of one big elephant in the room. The conflict never gets resolved! This is unfortunately a very common way that people try and deal with conflict because it seems like the right thing to do, the idea of if we ignore it, it will go away, but unfortunately all it will do is fester and like the mango if we just leave it, eventually it will simply rot and go bad, and I am afraid that in many relationship whether married or otherwise, we have rotting conflict issues that we need to clean up. It is way better to deal with conflict in the moment or the near future, within the next 24hrs because after that it becomes harder simply because we do not remember all the details of what brought us there in the first place.
- 2. Competing – Win / Lose – Fight for the mango:** This is where one person will fight for the mango and they will get that mango regardless of the feelings of the other person. So the mango will become an object to be conquered and taken. This is where we see conflict ends up with who is right and who is wrong. Or even the place where we end up with correcting small details of a conversation or event to prove a superiority over your spouse and to win. This will create an unsafe atmosphere where one spouse will always feel less than, and the other as their superior.
- 3. Conceding – Lose / Win – Surrender the mango:** Now with the conceding conflict type, I am not talking in the same way as in as Christians we simply give up the fruit because Jesus asked us to, I am talking about the person who surrenders the mango for the sake of having peace. This is people pleasing that comes into play and in the beginning it might be OK, it might be doable, but after awhile if the person simply concedes the entire time, they will slowly start building resentment for the other person in the relationship and start feeling more and more like a doormat or as an object to be used. From the outside this seems like a selfless thing to do and no doubt that could be the motive, but if we simply surrender it over every time we do not give our spouse an opportunity to be a blessing to you or an opportunity to grow.

This is one I would say that if you are called to surrender or to give it up every time, that is amazing and it's a great way to please the Lord, just make sure that you are pleasing the Lord and not doing it out of people pleasing.

**4. Compromising – 50 / 50 – Share the mango:** Now we are getting somewhere, the last 2 here are more healthy and I will confidently say this can be the aim for most of us. Compromising though in some marriage books is something people discourage but me and Adnrea have found compromising to be a great ally in our relationship for us. Compromising is when you do not see another way out and with the best motive and intentions you try to make the best decision in the moment that you can. In this example it would be to divide the mango in half and you both enjoy a portion of the fruit. Maybe one can cut it in half and the other one can pick first. Either way you do it, you are honoring your spouse in this way. Again, depending on the relationship dynamic you have and the differences between you and your spouse, for many of you compromising is the only way to resolve conflict, and just like I said earlier, make sure you do a heart check and do it out of love for one another!

**5. Collaborating – Win / Win – ?????:** This is the hardest one to obtain, but its certainly possible! Now what will you do with that one piece of fruit that you have if there are 2 of you and you cannot divide it or get more? Church who are we? We are Christians!! We have access to an almighty wonderful and all wise God that we can go to his throne room and lay at His feet and ask Him what to do. This last conflict type only works in the parameters of a selfless marriage!! Its only when you are not thinking about yourself and now you are working with your spouse and you both come to a place where you say Lord, what do we do in this situation and you both got to prayer on it together! Maybe in prayer God will give you a strategy that you can use or maybe God will show one of you what to do with it. Maybe God will tell you to take that mango and go bless your neighbor together and then you both come out winning in the end! **It's NOT about winning in the conflict, but its about how you love in the conflict and glorify Jesus' name in the conflict!**

**C. How do you respond in conflict?** Now that we know the different types of conflict you might be prone to, but who should make the first move when you are dealing with conflict? I would say it's the more mature one! I do not think it should always fall on one spouse to make the move, I think in an ideal world we can take turns, but I would say it's the one who is more mature in that situation to make the first move! But what if my spouse does not want to respond well in conflict? What if you have tried everything you can think of and conflict is just out of hand every time? Instead of going through one of the conflict types we just went through they skip all of them and throws the mango away or even at you! This again brings us to a **caveat** that we have to take seriously and let me say this. **You are not responsible for you spouse behavior in conflict!**

You are only responsible for your own behavior! **2 Corinthians 5:9-11** “Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. **10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.**“ Does it say that we will stand together as husband and wife before the Lord? NO, we will each one stand before the Lord in judgement one day so this is a sober reminder that blaming your spouse will not get you very far, but we are responsible for our own actions and responses in our relationships, we are not responsible for the other person’s actions and responses. This again comes back to navigating the more complex areas of your marriage with someone that has either been there or is walking close with Jesus to help you navigate it.

**1. Choosing to do the next right thing** – Did you know that Choice equals change? We cannot do anything or even start anything if we first do not choose to do something about it or choose to do the next right thing. Now I understand that you can’t always choose your relationships, like siblings or parents, but you can choose how you will think and act in those relationships, especially in the ones that you did choose like your spouse. **You can choose every day how you follow God’s Way and you can choose each day whether you will develop fulfilling or dissatisfying relationships around you.** **Proverbs 23:7** For as he thinks within himself, so he is. & **Galatians 5:13** You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh ; rather, serve one another humbly in love. We have been given this amazing gift of freewill where we get to choose how we interact in our relationships. We have been given this freedom where we can either serve one another humbly in love, or we can indulge in the flesh, the choice is yours! I know that relationships are complex so let’s take a step back and think of it this way. Every day we choose our priorities, we choose where we will spend our time, money and energy. For example, too much time spent at work, school, shopping, friends, this will eventually neglect your spouse. You can easily get out of balance with relationships depending on the choices we make. Choosing to do the next right thing is something that all of us need to have in the forefront of our minds as we navigate the complexities of the relationships around us, but remember, you always have a choice, so choose wisely. **Deuteronomy 30:19** “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. **Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live!**” I love how God has placed a choice in front of all of us today, tomorrow and the next day, we get to choose and for some its like, I don’t know what to choose!! God tells us in His holy scriptures how we need to choose so that we can have healthy relationships if we follow His Way and if we choose the next right thing! One of the first choices we need to make in conflict when it comes up is the tone in which we respond in...

2. **Tone matters** – **Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.** How you start your conversation in conflict really sets the pace and already helps you with your outcome. “You want to fight, I’ll show you a fight!!” or I would love to talk to you! How we start our conversations is VITAL! How the first minute or 2 goes will set the tone for the rest of the encounter. Pastor Stefan developed a tool many years ago we use often here at church called S.T.A.R., and this morning I want to start by teaching you how to use S.T.A.R. because what it does is help us set the tone of how we respond in conflict. Let me show you, lets say we use a made up example where I am at home boiling water and Andrea comes in and says that I am boiling the water the wrong way, what do I do then? How do I respond in this situation where conflict is bound to start?

- i. **Stop, do not fix** – You cannot fix your spouse! You cannot change their mind! You are about to enter conflict and they want to express feelings of frustration, hurt, or anger and you need to be ready to respond properly. The best thing you can do is to stop, and know that you cannot fix the situation you are in currently. Easy right!
- ii. **Take a breath** – Let oxygen into your body, and let it out, maybe do it a second time, and do not do it in an extreme way, just take a breath! Why should you take a breath? Well, it provides much need O2 to your brain and it helps calm you down in the moment. With me so far?
- iii. **Appreciation Memory** – Now we can get a bit more technical and this is at the heart of STAR. Let me give you a little brain science, we have something in our brains called a limbic system and its where we get our knee jerk reaction like flight, flight, faint or freeze from and its where our emotions come from. Now funny thing about emotions are, when we think of a good memory and start feeling good and when we think about a bad memory we start to feel angry or sad. The limbic system does not understand past feelings and emotions are just in the past, it will reignite those feelings in the moment for you. This can be somewhat frustrating if bad memories keep coming up, but this is why we do Inner Healing here at church and at the Set Free to help you with that. What we are looking for though in STAR is to have a good memory that you can go back to remember a good memory so that your limbic will release dopamine. Now just as a side note, when we rely on addictions like drugs and alcohol it severely interferes with our limbic and changes how the dopamine is released. But for this morning, now I can go to a memory where I have a positive interaction with Andrea. Let me share mine with you... Back in 2008, we where newly married, she was in Asper School of Business and I was working here at church as the IT guy, working at Superstore in their AV department, and milking cows. So it was a busy time for us as is for many newlyweds, and this was around my birthday and I just got back from work. I was tired, I was going to take a nap

on our mattress on the floor and then go work at Superstore that night till closing. When I walked into our room, I saw on our mattress 3 lego Batman sets! I was wondering, what is this, what are they doing here? Then behind me I heard footsteps and it was Andrea, she walked up behind me hugged me and said, thank you for working so hard, here is 3 sets, one for each of the jobs you are working... Man, I felt so good, how blessed I am, a wife that loved me so much that she made some money on the side and got me something that was and is close to my heart. So how do you think I felt in that moment when she gave those to me?? GREAT!! At peace... Even now up here, I can think back to that and I can experience that same feeling of love from her! So now, when I need to practice star, and its for Andrea, I go to that memory and this allows me to do the last step....

- iv. **Respond in Love** – Now my words still matter, but right now, my whole body is yelling at her despite the words coming out of my mouth that I love her, I love her! Lets replay our scenario, I am boiling water, “You are doing it wrong!” Stop, breath, lego, lego, lego, respond in love... That’s it! Easy right... But let me just say this, STAR is a tool that only works IF you practice it! If you do not practice it, it will not work in the moment because you will be overwhelmed and not remember what STAR is, in fact you might see some stars if you are not careful!! But getting our tone right, leads us into the next step, which is...

- 3. **Speak truth in love - Ephesians 4:15 Rather speaking the truth in love.** This is something where we need to find balance! We will often tend to lean one way or another, some of us speaking truth, because that’s what is most important, to be honest, but in the process we hurt our spouse! OR on the other side we lean towards that we should love, because that is what is most important that they know they are loved. So which one is it? Its BOTH, this is a BOTH/AND. Ephesians says rather speaking the truth in love! We need to be honest and speak the truth, YES, and we need to be loving in the way we do it, YES. This is a skill that we learn over time and the STAR tool helps tremendously to be able to speak that truth in love. Sometimes we feel the pressure to respond immediately when an issue comes up and then we feel forced to respond quickly and that can lead to a knee jerk reaction answer. Let me say, you don’t have to solve an issue immediately. And I totally understand why we do that, we either feel the pressure to solve it now or we get it from Ephesians - **Ephesians 4:26 And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry** So we read this and we take it very literally as in we have to solve our issue now before the sun goes down. Its not what Paul was talking about, he is telling us not to wait too long, to resolve the issue that you are in quickly. If it meant literally when the sun goes down, then in summer here in Manitoba we are OK, we have till like 9pm, but in winter, I hope you have all your

issues figured out before supper because the sun is going down a little bit earlier! I am saying this so that you would take a moment and instead of a quick reaction, take a moment to respond with truth in love.

**4. Choosing a No Losers Policy** – As we are getting close to wrapping up the series here, even from the beginning of the first message, I knew that I wanted to finish with this statement in the same way we finish the marriage seminar. I think you will agree with me that your spouse is not a loser! They are the one that should be treasured, they are the one we submit to out of reference for Christ, they are our best friend, they are our person. **Go ahead, take a moment, look at your spouse, tell them, “You are not a loser!”** In order to establish a no-losers policy, we need to come up with a new definition of winning. Winning cannot be about getting your way, because if the goal is to get your way it locks your spouse on the losing side. It also comes down to on how we define winning. I understand that the instant thought of winning is that one of you come out on top, but what if winning becomes about how your marriage wins out and how winning is something that Jesus can look at and say... Well done!!! Now that is winning! Remember, you are wearing the same team jerseys! You might be playing different positions, but you are playing on the same side! Never forget that! One way I have always thought of a No Losers Policy is to **Advocate for your spouse against yourself!** Let me say it again, learn to advocate for your spouse against yourself! This is such a hard skill to master but the benefits are huge. Imagine being locked in conflict and now you get to a place where you are standing in the way for your spouse against yourself. You are standing there defending them against your own arguments! Be an advocate for your wife, like Jesus is for you! **1 John 2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.** If Jesus is our advocate, how much more should we not be the advocate for the one He gave us here on earth? Again, while you are in conflict, you can tell them, come to my corner, I have an inside scoop to his strategy and its full of holes! We can work this out! When we then choose a No Losers Policy, conflict is no longer a predator coming to get you that you have to fear, but it’s a companion telling you what you need to change in order to have better unity as you walk in God’s Way!

**D. Conclusion – Saying “I do” again & again-** Can we take a moment and reflect back to our wedding days? Do you remember where it was? Do you remember what your spouse looked like, what they were wearing? How much younger they looked! Do you remember your vows? You don’t have to remember the details, but do you remember the part in the vows where you had to say “I DO”? Yeah... I want to challenge you at the end of this little mini series to remember that moment of “I do” because when we said it, we meant it, but that “I do” was not just for that day, was not just for that moment was it? That “I do” was for the future and I want to challenge you today church to say



**“I do” in the difficult moments, during conflict, and to say “I do” to a selfless marriage, to do it God’s Way.** I want to challenge you today to examine your marriage and see where you need to adjust, where you need to die to yourself. **John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.** A selfless marriage demands but one thing, your life! If we choose not to die to self, we will remain alone, but if we willing lay our lives down, we will bear much fruit! **John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.** Church, in order for us to have a selfless marriage and build healthy relationships around us we have to remain attached to the vine! We have an opportunity to bear good fruit for God’s sake as we demonstrate how to walk in a Selfless Marriage, not just for us, but so that we can be an example to all those around us as we show God’s love to one another!

**I would like to Encourage you to do the following:**

- Stay connected to the vine, be filled by the Holy Spirit
- Practice S.T.A.R. get an appreciation memory ready
- Implement a No Losers Policy with your spouse
- Ask God what is your next step towards a Selfless Marriage?
- Next Marriage Seminar is September 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> signups are online

**Let’s Pray!**