Resolving Conflict, Part Two

Guest: Dennis Rainey
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Bob: There are too many couples today who, when they experience conflict in a marriage, instead of looking for a way to resolve that conflict, they start looking for a way out. Here’s Dennis Rainey.

Dennis: One of the big problems within the Christian community and America is we throw around the “D-word”, threatening divorce in our marriages. It is why it has become a reality—that the divorce rate in the church is higher than it is outside the church. When we get angry, we really have to be careful what we say.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, July 26th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. If there is conflict in your marriage, the solution is not to get rid of your spouse. The solution is to learn how to resolve conflict biblically.

Welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. Anger is one of those issues in a marriage relationship that can set off an explosion that is hard to put the pieces back together again when that kind of explosion has happened.

Dennis: I agree. I made the mistake one time, in my marriage, of saying, “I didn’t have an anger problem.” Then, God showed me that maybe I had a bit more of a problem than I thought about.

Bob: Just hadn’t been provoked sufficiently yet.

Dennis: I hadn’t had enough children yet. (laughter) So, I did have some children and did have to learn how to deal with my anger. I have to say one of the great things about this season of life (Barbara and I are empty nesters now)—there is a little less tension, in terms of raising children, obviously. There’s also a little more time to resolve issues and less competition, in terms of when you go about doing that. I’ve really enjoyed that.

It’s a sweet time. Doesn’t mean you do it perfectly just because there is less tension there and less distraction. It can be a little more fluid, perhaps. You can kind of allow one another to process. There just aren’t the interruptions, Bob, in this stage. You know what? It’s good.
Bob: I find a lot of couples are surprised by anger. A lot of couples don’t understand anger. They don’t know what the Bible teaches about anger. They don’t know what they should do if they feel anger. If you’re going to look at the subject of conflict, you really do have to pull back and talk about anger, which is one of the themes that we address at the Weekend to Remember marriage getaways.

We talk about resolving conflict. We spend some time looking at where anger comes from; how we’re to deal with it when we experience anger, when it’s provoked in us. I think a lot of couples who hear as we go through this material, some lights come on. They go, “That helps. That helps me understand what’s going on in me. That helps me understand what’s going on in my spouse.”

It’s one of the reasons we encourage couples, “Get a weekend where the two of you can get away and spend some time together at a Weekend to Remember marriage getaway.” First of all, it’s good to have two-and-a-half days where you’re focusing on your marriage and you’re with one another.

Dennis: It’s good to get tools; that you both have a common vocabulary; you understand what the tools are; you can talk about what forgiveness is, what forgiveness isn’t; what things cause anger in your relationship.

Bob: Hear from some speakers who are genuine, authentic. They’ve experienced conflict in their marriages. They understand what the Bible teaches. They can help you with how to negotiate your relationship because they’ve been down the path. They’ve dealt with this themselves, and they’ve looked at what the Bible has to say about conflict and about anger.

Right now, we’re hoping FamilyLife Today listeners will go ahead and sign up for one of our upcoming fall Weekend to Remember marriage getaways. To encourage you to do that, we’ve put FamilyLife Today listeners in a group. You don’t have to sit together when you go to the Weekend to Remember, but you’ll be a part of the FamilyLife Today group.

What that means is that: When you register and identify yourself as a FamilyLife Today listener, you will save at least $100 per couple off the regular registration fee. All you have to do, as you fill out the registration form online at FamilyLifeToday.com, you type my name into the key code box. Type “BOB” in the key code box on the online registration form.

Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY; say, “I listen to FamilyLife Today, and I want to be a part of the FamilyLife Today group. We want to register for the Weekend to Remember marriage getaway.” You’ll save at least $100 per couple off the regular registration fee.

In addition, if you register before the end of the month, we'll send you an early-bird gift. It is a game for couples called Spouse-ology®. It’s something you can play with other couples and get to know one another better. It’s a lot of fun.
So, go to our website or give us a call; find out more about when the *Weekend to Remember* is coming to a city near where you live; get registered; identify yourself as a *FamilyLife Today* listener. You will save at least $100 per couple off the regular registration fee. Again, if you sign up before the end of the month, we'll send you the *Spouse-ology*® gift as well. We hope to see you at one of these *Weekend to Remember* marriage getaways.

**Dennis:** Some of you who are listening, you've been invited to a wedding; and you're not sure what to give the couple who are getting married. You know what makes a great wedding gift? Send them to the *Weekend to Remember* marriage getaway. I think it is the finest marriage preparation that a couple can go through prior to marriage. After they are married, it is a great investment in their marriage as they move beyond the “Just-married” phase.

**Bob:** Well, one of the things that engaged couple is going to hear about, or you’re going to hear about if you come join us at one of these events this fall, is the issue of conflict and how to deal with it—anger and where it comes from, what the Bible has to say about it, how we process that in our marriage.

Today, we’re going to hear Part Two from Dennis on conflict recorded at a recent *Weekend to Remember* marriage getaway. So, this is an example of some of what gets talked about at the *Weekend to Remember*. Here is Dennis Rainey on resolving conflict in marriage.

**Dennis:** (recorded message) I’ll never forget a young man that I worked with when I worked with high school kids in Dallas, Texas. He showed the two different ways people deal with getting angry. “His mom,” he said, “was a fighter from an Italian family.” She’d love to duke it out, put on the boxing gloves. A good emotional, stimulating discussion was her idea of real communication.

She was married to one of the prominent physicians in the city of Dallas. He came from a home that had a long line of peace pipe smokers. So, here they were: She jumping into the ring, chasing him around the ring, trying to have a good fight. He was running away from her. They never really resolved anything.

This young man, at the age of 15 years old when I led him to faith in Christ, confessed this, “There has never been a day when I haven’t placed myself between my mom and my dad. Going to my dad and saying, ‘Dad, Dad, Dad, don’t you understand Mom needs to talk about this? Mom, don’t be so tough. Don’t be so emotional. Don’t be so, so harsh with Dad. Don’t you understand who Dad is?’”

He said, “Because of me pitting myself between the two, there has not been a day in my life when I have not thought about committing suicide.”
There is an African proverb that says, “When the elephants fight, it’s the grass that suffers.” “When the elephants fight, it’s the grass that suffers.” How we resolve conflict is important to our legacies that we pass on to future generations. We can either stuff it, or we can blow it. A lot of us are good at blowing up. A lot of us are good at running from it. We need to learn how to deal with our anger in a constructive way.

I believe anger is a God-given emotion. I don’t think anger is wrong. I think the expression of anger sometimes can be wrong. Anger can be an emotional pain that is telling us something isn’t right, like a red light on the dashboard that says, “Oil” or “Engine.” It is warning you something is going on underneath the hood that needs to be addressed.

When we get angry, it means something. Usually, it means we are disappointed or we’ve been hurt. Anger is really a secondary emotion. It seldom is the primary emotion. It is usually the result of something else having hurt us or disappointed us, expectations not being met. It is not wrong to feel anger. It is wrong to harbor anger. That becomes what the Bible calls resentment. Romance in a relationship cannot grow in the toxic soil of a human heart filled with resentment.

A good question for every couple here to think about sometime this weekend and maybe answer: “When was the last time you two apologized to each other for a hurt you caused one another?” Just reflect back. When was the last time you said, “I’m sorry that I hurt you, disappointed you?” I think it’s the practice of knowing how to deal with our anger that turns marriages into great marriages, but anger can be a dangerous weapon.

I want to show you a clip from a movie. FamilyLife has the privilege of having established a significant partnership with Fireproof. It is a part of our long-term strategy in partnering with people who have a vision and passion for marriages and families. It’s done by a church in southern Georgia, by the same church that did Facing the Giants. It’s not a cheesy, Christian film. It has a great story.

A storyline of a fireman who, in his marriage, found out his marriage was being damaged. They basically neglected each other. I want you to watch a scene where you can feel how anger can be used to damage another person. This is Kirk Cameron speaking to his wife in the kitchen.

(movie clip begins playing)

**Wife:** What are you doing?

**Husband:** See you left me no pizza.

**Wife:** Caleb, I just lit that candle. I like the way it smells.

**Husband:** Well, I don’t. Did you leave me any dinner at all?
Wife: I assumed you were eating with Michael.

Husband: Does it not occur to you that there are two people living in this house, and both of them need to eat?

Wife: You know what, Caleb? If you would communicate with me, maybe I could have something for you.

Husband: Why do you have to make everything so difficult?

Wife: Oh, I’m making everything difficult?! It seems to me like I’m the one carrying the weight around here while you’re off doing your own thing.

Husband: Excuse me! I’m the one out there working to pay this mortgage, and I pay for both of the cars.

Wife: Yes, and that is all you do! I pay all of our bills with my salary.

Husband: Which you agreed to do. That’s fair. Do you not like this house? Do you not like your car?

Wife: Caleb, who takes care of this house? Me. Who washes all the clothes? Me. Who gets all the groceries? Me. Not to mention, I’m helping my parents every weekend. You know, I’ve got all this pressure on me. The only thing you ever do for anybody is for yourself.

Husband: Let me tell you something. You don’t know the first thing about pressure! Alright? You think, I put out house fires for myself or rush to car wrecks at 2:00 a.m. for myself or pull a child’s body out of a lake for myself? You have no idea what I go through!

Wife: Oh, yes. What do you do around here other than watch TV and waste time on the internet? You know what? If looking at that trash is how you get fulfilled, that’s fine; but I will not compete with it!

Husband: Well, I sure don’t get it from you!

Wife: And you won’t because you care more about saving for your stupid boat and pleasing yourself than you ever did about me!

Husband: (yelling) STOP! I’m sick of you. You disrespectful, ungrateful, selfish woman. How dare you say that to me! You constantly nag me, and you drain the life out of me! I’m tired of it! If you can’t give me the respect I deserve—LOOK AT ME—then, what’s the point of this marriage?
**Wife:** (sniffling) I want out. I just want out.

**Husband:** You want out? That’s fine with me!

**Dennis:** (recorded message) We showed that to our speakers—we have 70 couples who speak at our *Weekend to Remember* conferences. We asked them, “Should we show this at our events?” because we have an arrangement where we can do that. To a person, they said, “Yes, because that’s what’s happening in a lot of Christian marriages”—obviously, in the world, too.”

Anger can be destructive. Patterns of anger can cause a relationship to shrivel. That’s why anger has to be controlled. Anger has to be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit yielded to God. Patterns of anger expression have to be broken. In some cases, maybe to get a third party, like a pastor or counselor, to be able to break those patterns.

When we get angry, we really have to be careful what we say. It’s been said, “I have regretted my speech; never my silence.”

One of the big problems within the Christian community and America is: “We throw around the ‘D-word’, threatening divorce in our marriages”. It is why it has become a reality—so that the divorce rate in the church is higher than it is outside the church.

If anyone here, (I’m just assuming nothing; I know nothing about you all as couples), but if anyone here, every uses the “D-word” before you go back home, first turn to each other and ask for another’s forgiveness. Eliminate the “D-word”. Don’t ever use it, ever again, in your marriage relationship.

First of all, “Pray Every Day as a Couple.” Secondly, “Understand the Anatomy of Anger”—that it is a warning light that something is wrong. You’ve got to talk about what’s wrong. That really leads us to the third essential for handling conflict, “Loving Confrontation,” Loving confrontation.

Words can either bring healing or they can bring additional hurt. Ephesians Chapter 4, verse 29 says, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification, according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

There’s a couple of stories I’m about to tell about myself that I’m not particularly proud of. This one occurred early in our marriage. We’d been married long enough to have six children. I think they were 12 years in age and under. I was getting ready to speak at a retreat. We were taking the entire family—going to make it a vacation as I spoke—so, six kids, eight days, 19 suitcases.

Workmen, at the same time, were installing an alarm system. There were dust drills, hammers, a mess—all occurring as Barbara was getting everything ready. While Barbara was washing, cleaning, packing, and getting everything ready to leave the next
day, that morning the washing machine spilled out its contents all over the floor, soap and suds everywhere.

Here, she picked up a couple of kids with ear infections and drug them along with the laundry to the laundry mat so they would have enough clean clothes. It took her most of the day. There were interruptions of the phone, the workman, the youngest, Laura, who was fussing because of her ear infection. It was now 5 o’clock in the afternoon. Nothing was planned for dinner. I arrived, heroically, and met her in town for a hamburger and fed the kids.

I dashed to church, took the kids to Awana to get memory verses; and Barbara went home to finish packing. I went to the office to get my speaking notes. When I arrived about 10 o’clock that night, Barbara had not finished packing. I arrived on the scene.

These are Barbara’s words: “Dennis had to make some phone calls. Later, about midnight, came upstairs and started helping me pack. Great guy, huh? Nineteen suitcases. He was tired, and I was out; but I was still on my feet. As he pulled one of his suits out of the closet, he made one of those classic male observations about organization. Quote, ‘You know, Honey? You could avoid all this last minute stuff if you’d just do a little planning ahead.’”

I can’t believe I said that, really. Is Barbara here? She can’t confirm; you can confirm it later.

Barbara goes on, “He didn’t say it cuttingly or even with any irritation in his voice.”

Like that would have mattered.

“He actually meant it to be helpful. Nonetheless, I felt the anger rise to the very top of my scalp. I bit my lip and said nothing; but thinking, ‘Here I’ve been working hard all day, handling all kinds of interruptions; and he talks about organization.’ We finally fell in bed about 2:00 a.m. It seemed like we’d been asleep five minutes when the alarm went off at 5:30. We had an early flight.”

That was thoughtful of me, too, wasn’t it?

“Somehow, we got ourselves and the children dressed, dragged everything to the car, headed for the airport. I was so tired, I could barely function as we zoomed down the freeway. Dennis, again, tried to give me some helpful pointers on getting ready to go away on trips.

“’You know, Honey, you try to accomplish too much before we leave on these trips. If you’d just learn to prioritize and do the really essential things, this could be a lot easier on everybody, particularly you.’ That did it!”
Barbara writes, “The steam I had managed to keep inside the night before came shooting out; and I fumed, ‘Priorities! Priorities!’ How do you prioritize a busted washer, having dragged six loads of clothes to the laundry mat, not to mention, a sick child? How am I supposed to prioritize workmen who keep the house in a state of total disaster all day long before I’m leaving? Here I am trying to get everything right so we don’t have to come home to chaos; and you talk about getting organized and getting and setting priorities.’

“Dennis was stunned. His dependable, loving wife, who was normally unflappable, had flipped. I was kind of shocked at myself. I seldom lose it with Dennis, but this time was all just too much. The rest of the ride to the airport was quiet—"

It was also quite chilly, as I recall.

“—and so was the plane flight. Everything was pointed out with good intentions. He, actually, meant to be helpful, but all it did was hurt; and I responded badly.”

If we’re going to resolve conflict, you have to approach confrontation carefully. When we speak the truth, you need to check your motivation; you need to check the timing; you need to check circumstances; you need to check the emotional gas tank of your spouse in the context of his or her life and where they are coming at it.

When you speak the truth, if it is the truth—I think much of what I had to say here was, frankly, not necessarily the truth. I could have picked a whole lot better time to have approached her.

Bob: Well, we’ve been listening to Part Two of a message on resolving conflict in marriage from a recent Weekend to Remember marriage getaway.

Dennis: Kind of sounded like a confession.

Bob: You were reliving that story as you were listening to it here.

Dennis: You know, I’ve told that story a few times; but I just keep going, “What an idiot!”

Bob: “What was I thinking?”

Dennis: What was I thinking? (laughter) You know, my wife is a wonderful mother and wife to me and six kids. She had packed all these bags. I mean, we had 18 bags or something. It was—

Bob: “Sweetheart, you wouldn’t be so rushed if you’d do a little pre-planning.”

Dennis: I mean, you know, that’s what you call, Bob, a rookie mistake.
Bob: Yes. That’s right.

Dennis: You just don’t think you’ll make it in year 12, 13, or 14 in your marriage!

Bob: You hope you don’t make it again after the first time you’ve made it.

Dennis: Oh, yes. Here’s a verse just to wrap up today: James, Chapter 1, verse 19. This is The Living Bible. “It is best to listen much, speak little, and not become angry.” I’ve said this many times, “I have regretted my speech; never my silence,” for the most part. There have been times when I should have said some things. That was my mistake, too.

Bob: The other night. (laughter)

Dennis: Yes, the other night that happened. Here’s the thing. Who doesn’t need to be sharpened in terms of communication, resolving conflict, and strengthening your marriage? That’s why we’re talking about—encouraging you to get away to a Weekend to Remember marriage getaway in the next few months. We’ve got them all over the country—have more than a 130 of them around the United States. Take us up on these offers and get away. Have a romantic getaway for just the two of you.

Bob: We’ve worked out a special deal for FamilyLife Today listeners. If sign up and indicate that you listen to FamilyLife Today, you will save at least $100 per couple off the regular registration fee just by identifying yourself as a FamilyLife Today listener. It is the lowest rate we make available.

All you have to do, if you’re signing up online to go to a Weekend to Remember marriage getaway, you type my name in the online key code box. Type “BOB” in the box. If you’re calling 1-800-FL-TODAY to sign up (1-800-358-6329) for a getaway, just mention, “I listen to FamilyLife Today, and I want to FamilyLife Today group rate.” Again, you’ll save at least $100 per couple off the regular registration fee when you do that.

If we hear from you before the end of the month, we’re going to send you, as a thank-you gift for signing up early, a copy of the game, Spouse-ology® for couples to play together. It is a fun game to get to know other couples. We’ll send that out to you as our way of saying, “Thanks,” for signing up early for a Weekend to Remember. Again, that’s if we hear from you before the end of the month.

So, go online at FamilyLifeToday.com, type my name. Type “BOB” in the key code box. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY and sign up for an upcoming Weekend to Remember marriage getaway. You’ll save at least $100 per couple off the regular registration fee by identifying yourself as a FamilyLife Today listener.
Now, tomorrow, we’re going to hear Part Three of Dennis’ message on resolving conflict in marriage. We’re going to talk about forgiveness and rebuilding trust in a marriage relationship. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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