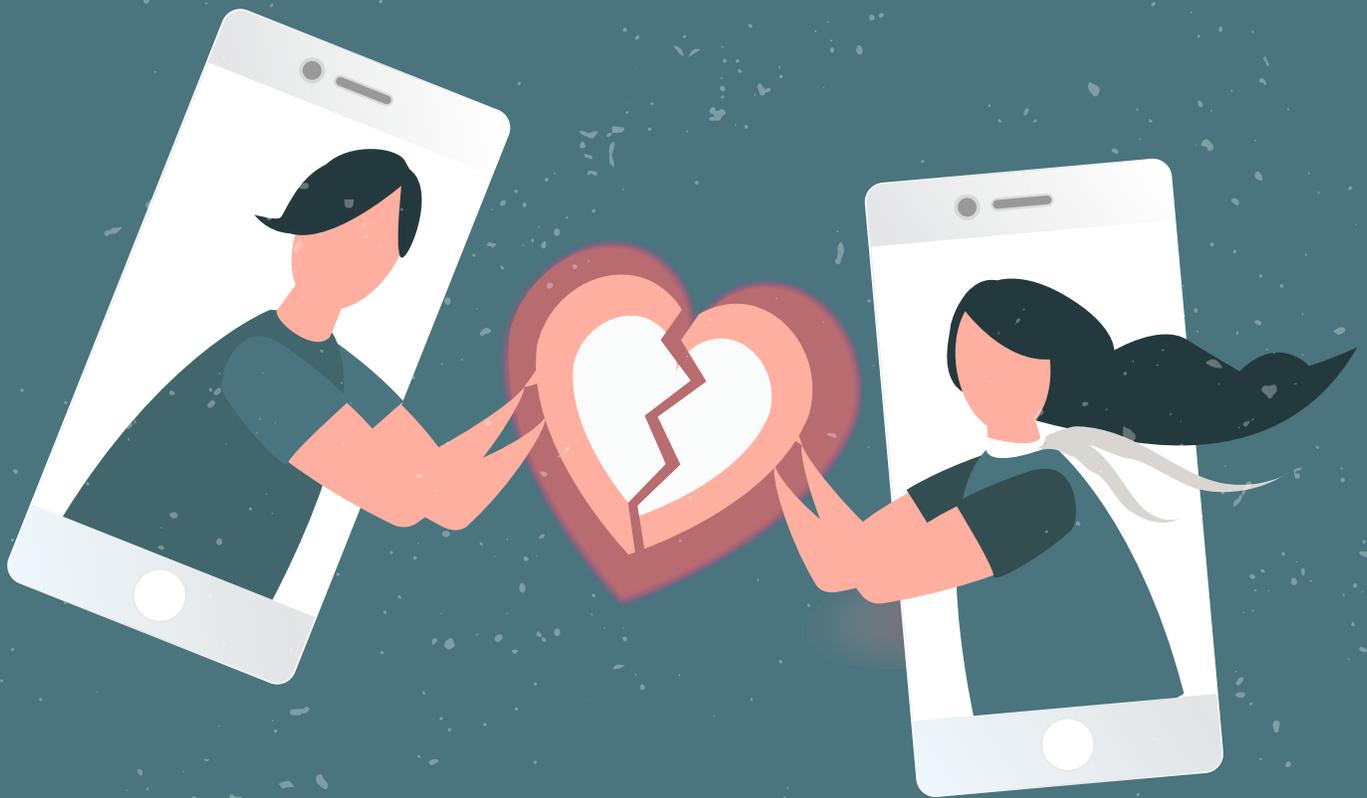


# CONFLICT — & — COMMUNICATION



MONTHLY MARRIAGE WORKSHOP  
MONTH 6

JEFF & ALYSSA BETHKE

Month 6 is here! And we are talking about all things communication and conflict. You might think those are two separate topics, but as the month progresses I hope you see that the secret to healthy conflict is first to have healthy communication! We can't wait to see what the Lord does this month!

**THIS MONTH'S WEBCAST: AUGUST 5<sup>th</sup> 4:30PM PST.**

See y'all soon!

**JEFF + ALYSSA**

## THE 'WHY'

Let's be honest. If you've been married for more than five minutes, than you've gone through the usual rodeo of repeating arguments, butting heads over the same things, or getting into fights you can't remember why they started. One of the quickest ways to poison a marriage is to have unhealthy conflict. But the absence of conflict isn't the answer either. The answer is healthy conflict. And that's what we are going to work on this month. If we want to take our marriages to the next level, we need to learn how to communicate on a deeper level and better than most average marriages. And so this month we are going to break old patterns, molds, habits, and behaviors and allow us to break free into new territory of healthy communication and intimacy!

## THE 'HOW'

After doing this month's action plan, you will walk away with:

1. Tools and helpful tips to have healthy conflict.
2. Allow yourselves to see conflict as good (if done right).
3. Specific tricks that can help a conflict from getting out of hand.
4. Ways to better understand your spouse and read between the lines of what the conflict is trying to say.

# WEEK 1

## WHAT'S ACTUALLY BEHIND THE FIGHT?

Guys. I still remember one of mine and Jeff's earliest fights. It involved yelling and screaming and hurt feelings and tears. And at the end we both were stunned. What just happened? Is this marriage? Is this normal? And want to know the best part? It was about what couch to buy for our first house. But we laugh about it now (thankfully). And some part of me is thankful it happened so early because we learned a big lesson immediately.

*And the lesson is - it's always about more than the couch. Don't just talk about the couch.*

When I think back to the fight about the couch, the main point of contention was that I thought the couch was ugly (which Jeff now agrees, but wouldn't say back then). And Jeff just kept pressing me really hard on it and telling me it was a good deal and it wasn't amazing, but we needed to get it (it was used from a friend) instead of going buy a new one.

Now that's what the fight was about actually in the moment. But guess what? After we debriefed, it was clear it was about so much more than that.

For me, I was a new wife and was putting a lot of pressure on myself to make my home Pinterest worthy and beautiful, and I knew the home was a reflection on me. It wasn't just about a couch. It was about me being a good wife.

And for Jeff, he knew we just got married, and money was tight. He had fears and anxieties of how to get us on the right footing financially the first few months of marriage. And so for him, it wasn't just a couch, it was this couch represents us being frugal and we can't spend one more dollar, or we will go broke and homeless.

And what's funny is most marriage conflicts are like this. We conflict and fight on the surface and never actually say what we really think and mean, or what is really going on in our heart.

The first step to healthy communication (and this takes lots of practice and self-awareness) is to connect the argument or different point to your truest more rooted fears or concerns or thoughts. Why is this "fight" making you so upset? What's behind that? Can we go a little deeper?

And when you do, you need to commit as a couple to say those things. One of the things Jeff and I work on the most is saying what we are actually feeling not just what's on the surface.

*“Hey babe, I’m feeling really insecure today so can you try to be a little more gentle with me?”*

That’s one I find myself saying more now than earlier. When before I wouldn’t say anything and then just get extra sensitive with Jeff, and he wouldn’t know why.

So for week 1, answer the questions below and discuss how you guys can grow in love together on this issue.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rank your communication in regards to saying what is actually bothering you or truly going on in your heart during a conflict?

1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9 . 10

2. Think back to your last few conflicts - what was going on behind them? Past the surface? What were you really feeling? Letting your spouse into the vulnerability of your true self is a sure way to intimacy.

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3. What would you say is your most recurring fight or point of conflict? Why would you say this is the common conflict point? We will get to this one in the next few weeks, but want you guys to start discussing now.

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# WEEK 2

## PLAY BY THE RULES.

One of the most common fights for Jeff and I, which gets back to how we are wired, is I just simply hate conflict. Any bump in the road makes me want to run and hide. But Jeff (as an 8 on the Enneagram) sees a bump and wants to go straight for it, fix it, solve it, and move on. As you can imagine this isn't the most natural dynamic. But it's one we've learned to lean into in love.

But for years we'd get into conflicts, and they'd get close to getting out of hand because I'd start feeling pressured and wanted to run, and Jeff could sense that and say hey you can't just run when it gets hard (which is true). But our fights rarely ever got out of hand when talking about the content of the disagreement. They almost always got out of hand towards the end when I wanted to be done, and he didn't. We just had different thresholds, but no gameplan for this.

And you know what we did?

It took us four years, but we made conflict rules. Just like a baseball game or a board game. We made rules we had to agree upon in our fights mutually. And something magical happened. It has alleviated 90% of our problems and high tension moments.

Because when you write down rules and agree upon them (and sign them if you have to!), it makes it feel like the list or rules are an objective third party holding you guys accountable not just one person getting their way. And to do this, it takes lots of trust. It takes a lot of love. It takes a lot of grace. But it works.

And ours were simple:

1. No yelling, screaming or raising our voices. The minute that happens, someone has to call it out and be done. We can come back later and finish.
2. We promised not to run or call for a break just because it's uncomfortable.
3. Jeff promises that if I use our code word (this can be any word you guys agree on. Our friend's word is 'mistletoe,' which I think is funny) then immediately we stop talking and take a break.
4. Never have a big discussion while one or more of us is tired or hungry (can I get an amen?).

And it actually worked guys. Since I committed and promised to Jeff I will lean into conflict even when I don't want to, then when I use our code word he knows I really need a break from the conflict or I'm going to crumble. And he lets me. And he's seen the fruit of this agreement by letting me have a few minutes. We come back calmer and usually with softer hearts and tones.

What would the rules of the game be for your marriage? Answer below to get started.

1. What is the one thing your spouse does in a fight or conflict that's really hard for you or usually heightens your anxiety or tension?

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2. What's one thing you know in you that doesn't help you communicate well or conflict well (tired, hungry, a certain lie you believe, etc)?

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3. Now see if you guys can write up a list of rules of the game for conflict as well as a code word if necessary.

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# WEEK 3

## WHAT'S YOUR MAIN SOURCE OF CONFLICT? LEAN INTO IT.

These next two weeks are going to take some introspection and extra doses of grace for each other, so as you move forward maybe pray for peace and grace and compassion before conversations or date nights about the topic.

We asked in week one that you start thinking about your primary source of conflict. Because whether we like it or not, almost all couples have the one thing (or one big dynamic) that causes the same fight over and over again.

But so many of us are content just to let that keep happening. For years. But don't we want to break free? Don't we want to grow our marriage? To take our relationship to the next level?

For Jeff and I, it's easy. Jeff moves FAST. I mean really fast. For example, when we decided to move to Maui, I think from the time the idea was mentioned to when it was 100% 'decided' was about 24-48 hours. And he already had 2-3 possible houses he thought we should buy. And I think we were moved and lived in Maui within 3 months of that decision.

So it's an understatement to say he moves fast. He's what they call a 'resolute' personality. When he's sure of something he is SURE of something, and he starts trucking in that direction and never looks back.

And guess who's the opposite? Me.

I can be resolute, and I am firm in decisions, but I like to weigh all the options. To wait. To pray. To think on it for months. And then to jump. And this exact dynamic has come back to bite us time and time again. But mainly because we don't give each other grace.

Jeff tends to bulldoze me (that's how he says it, and he said I could say that :D) and not be understanding of my pace when I tend not to be more thankful for how gifted of a visionary and leader he is. I get stuck in the fear and anxiety of change that I miss what the Lord is leading him to do for the flourishing of our family.

But over the years we've come to learn that right smack dab in the middle of the two is where joy and growth is.

It's not about me being faster. It's not about Jeff slowing down.

It's about both happening at the same time. It's not about someone winning or losing. It's about combining our wirings and giftings to be a better team for the kingdom!

And this is hard but starts with actually seeing your spouse as a gift from God to balance you out. To make you guys a more well-rounded team. There are some things I've expressed caution about that Jeff is so thankful he heeded and listened to, and there are some things I jumped in faith right away that I'm so grateful I did too!

So this week work through that and make sure to realize you're a team in this, and what is usually seen as a curse can be reversed to a blessing.

1. What would you say is the most significant part about your spouse that is radically different than you?

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2. How is that 'difference' a blessing to your marriage (feel free to look at each other and speak this answer to the other)?

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3. In your regular conflicts, if one spouse's wiring or dynamic always tended to win, what would the marriage lose?

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4. When you guys are a team in your conflict, what does that look like? What does that feel like? How can you repeat it in the future?

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# WEEK 4

## REPENTANCE

*I'm going to let Jeff take over this week since he asked if he could write the last week.*

Hey guys!

Has Alyssa not killed this month's curriculum?! I still laugh about the couch. And I'm so glad she won that one! The couch was ugly!

For the last week of this month, I want every couple to lean into some serious heart searching and repentance. Repentance is just a fancy Bible word that means to 'turn around' or 'change course' or humbly apologize and commit to change. And it's so important in a marriage. And it's so crucial to healthy conflict.

We have to forgive over and over again. To love and serve each other. And to commit anew to each other every single day. So I'm going to keep the writing portion of this month short, but please spend extra time and reflection on the questions below, probably separately and then come and discuss together as a couple.

1. What would you say is your main sin you fall into in conflict?

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2. Why is that you think? Why do you constantly fall into that trap? Can you connect any dots to your family of origin, upbringing, or an experience you've had in the past?

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3. What are you most afraid of that is maybe behind your conflicts? Have you ever gently voiced that to your spouse?

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4. Take five minutes in silence and away from your phone, etc. and ask the Lord to reveal to you areas you need to grow in specifically in communication and conflict in your marriage. Then ask him for the help to accomplish that.

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5. Now meet with your spouse and go over your answers. Don't be afraid to say you're sorry. With specificity. And no qualifiers.

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