

Issue 50: Conflict Does Not Mean Your Relationship Is Failing

Messy Story of the Week

The argument was about the kitchen counter.

At least, that was where it began.

Someone had left dishes, school papers, a half-open package, and several things that belonged in other rooms scattered across it. Again.

One spouse saw the mess and thought, “I am the only person who notices what needs to be done.”

The other heard the frustrated comment and thought, “Nothing I do is ever good enough.”

Before long, they were no longer talking about the counter.

They were arguing about who cared more, who worked harder, and who was always criticizing whom.

The counter had become evidence in a much larger case each person was quietly building against the other.

But beneath the accusations was a practical problem they had never actually solved. They had different ideas about what the shared space was for, how quickly it needed to be cleared, and who was responsible for making that happen.

The conflict was not necessarily evidence that their relationship was failing.

It was evidence that their current arrangement was not working.

Faithful God Then and Now

Genesis 13:5–12

Abram and Lot had both accumulated livestock, possessions, and large households. The land could no longer support everything they were trying to manage in the same space.

Their herdsmen began to quarrel.

Abram could have ignored the tension. He could have blamed Lot for becoming too prosperous or demanded that everyone work harder to make the arrangement succeed.

Instead, Abram recognized that the conflict was revealing a real problem.

He said to Lot:

“Let there be no strife between you and me... for we are brothers.”
Genesis 13:8

Abram valued the relationship enough to name what was not working.

The solution was not for one household to pretend it needed less space. It was not for Abram to silently carry the strain in order to preserve an appearance of peace. The arrangement needed to change.

Abram and Lot separated their households, but Abram did not treat Lot as an enemy. He approached the conflict with generosity and gave Lot the first choice of land.

Sometimes preserving connection requires changing how people share space, responsibilities, time, or resources.

Peace is not always found by trying harder to tolerate an arrangement that is no longer working. Sometimes peace begins when people tell the truth about what needs to change.

What We Can Learn

- Conflict is often information. It can show us where an expectation, agreement, boundary, or arrangement is no longer working.
- Repeated arguments are rarely about only the visible issue. The dishes, schedule, forgotten task, or messy room may represent deeper concerns about respect, reliability, fairness, or belonging.
- Naming a problem does not threaten a healthy relationship. Refusing to address it may allow frustration and resentment to grow.
- Protecting connection does not require one person to over-carry the situation. Abram sought peace without pretending that two expanding households could continue using the same resources in the same way.
- Boundaries and practical changes can serve a relationship. Staying connected does not always mean maintaining the same level of access, proximity, or shared responsibility.

Behind the Curtain

In coaching, I often meet people who believe recurring conflict means something is fundamentally wrong with their relationship.

Sometimes the relationship is under serious strain. But often, the conflict is repeatedly pointing toward an expectation that was never clearly communicated or an arrangement that no longer fits the family's current needs.

One person may keep compensating for the problem. They remind, reorganize, clean up, smooth things over, or silently take on more responsibility. Because the immediate problem gets handled, the family never has to build a better system.

Eventually, the person who has been carrying the extra responsibility becomes exhausted or resentful. Then the conflict appears to be about their tone or reaction rather than the unsustainable arrangement beneath it.

The goal is not to eliminate every disagreement.

The goal is to become more curious about what the conflict is revealing.

What expectation has remained unspoken?

What responsibility has become unclear?

What boundary is missing?

What has changed in the family without a corresponding change in the way the family operates?

Conflict becomes more constructive when we stop treating it only as a disruption and begin listening to the information it carries.

Faithful Family Tools

Find Out What Is Happening Beneath the Conflict

Sometimes we know something is wrong in a relationship but cannot identify the pattern that keeps pulling us back into the same conflict.

My free audio course, *What's Happening in Your Relationships?*, will help you look beneath the visible struggle and begin identifying what needs attention.

[Listen to the free course](#)

Continue the Conversation on Facebook

The Faithful Families Free Community is a place to talk honestly about the everyday challenges of marriage, parenting, and family life while learning practical, faith-rooted ways forward.

[Join the Faithful Families Free Community](#)

Faith Step for the Week

Read Genesis 13:5–12.

Notice what Abram did not do.

He did not ignore the conflict between the herdsmen. He did not insist that the existing arrangement had to continue. He did not shame Lot for having needs that competed with his own.

He named the tension, affirmed the importance of the relationship, and made room for a practical solution.

Now think about one recurring conflict in your family.

Before deciding who is wrong, ask:

“What might this conflict be telling us is not working?”

You do not have to solve the entire problem this week. Begin by listening to what the conflict may be revealing.

Two-Minute Practice

Complete these two sentences:

“We keep arguing about _____.”

“The underlying problem may be _____.”

Try to name an expectation, responsibility, boundary, or arrangement rather than a person’s character.

For example:

“We keep arguing about the kitchen counter.”

“The underlying problem may be that we have never agreed on what must remain clear, who resets the space, or when it needs to happen.”

Clarity changes the conversation from “Who is the problem?” to “What problem do we need to address?”

Prayer

Lord,

You are not threatened by the places where our relationships feel strained.

Give us wisdom to recognize what our conflicts are revealing. Help us speak truth without turning against one another. Show us where expectations need to be clarified, responsibilities need to be redistributed, or boundaries need to be established.

Keep us from confusing avoidance with peace or over-carrying with faithfulness.

Teach us to value our relationships enough to address what is not working, and give us humility, courage, and generosity as we seek a better way forward.

Amen.

Coming Next

A conflict can become much larger when we respond to what we think another person meant without first checking whether our interpretation is accurate.

Next week, we will look at a misunderstanding that nearly led Israel into war—and how listening before reacting protected both truth and connection.

Did you miss an issue? [Check out the newsletter archive](#).