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Try This the Next Time You Argue

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Conflict is as unavoidable as traffic in Los Angeles. If you've got two people on a team, or in a family, who never argue, one of them isn't needed.

Conflict Is Unavoidable

Jesus, the greatest leader of all time, experienced conflict among his disciples, between the disciples, and himself, and between the religious leaders and political leaders and himself. As long as you're engaged in relationships there will be conflict. If you refuse to see conflict as an inevitable part of life, you are likely to view it as an unnecessary interruption of the flow--and you may respond to conflict with frustration, anger and intolerance.

Notice I said, "you may respond to conflict." I didn't say that "conflict will make you respond."

The Difference Is Critical

The difference is critical, because in the one case you determine your response to a given situation and in the other you become a victim of your circumstances.

The reality is this: Nobody has the power to make you angry or frustrated. You alone control your response; other people don't.

“Ryan, You're Making Me Mad”

I hammered this truth home with my children so effectively that one of them threw it back at me in the heat of an argument. As we verbally sparred over something important (like whose turn it is to mow the lawn, or who brought the car home with an empty gas tank), I could see I wasn't penetrating his defenses. In frustration, I said in a loud and stern voice (especially stern), "Ryan, you're making me mad."

"That's impossible!" he retorted. "I can't make you mad--you're responsible for your own feelings."

The moment the words left his mouth silence filled the room. We stared at each other. Father and son, eye-to-eye, toe-to-toe, one-on-one. I tried not to laugh. I bit my lower lip. No help there. I squinted--nada. I locked my jaw. Nope.

I Laughed Out Loud

Right in the middle of an argument with my son, I laughed out loud. As I laughed, I realized Ryan had learned an important lesson (okay, maybe he hadn't completely learned it, but at least he had heard it enough times he could repeat it at the appropriate moment).

While you can't completely avoid conflict, you can manage it. The key to managing conflict is to manage yourself. When you feel your emotional temperature rising, don't say, "He/she makes me so mad!" Or, "You frustrate me." Instead, take responsibility for your feelings. Choose to turn to Jesus and say, "Lord, enable me to respond as you did. Give me the grace I need to bridle my emotions so I can speak words that help." The better you manage yourself during conflict, the better you'll be able to manage the conflict.