

THE FIVE MARITAL CONFLICTS EXPLAINED

<https://fiercemarriage.com/the-5-marital-conflict-tactics-explained>

[00:00:00]

Selena: I think one of the biggest challenges and potentially the biggest blessings in marriage is conflict. And maybe that sounds funny to say-

Ryan: Interesting, yes.

Selena: But we are definitely sanctified and brought through the fire. When we are having conflict with our spouse there's sin nature in us, there are things that the Lord is trying to draw out of us. And often that happens through conflict, which makes it a blessing.

But if we can't communicate clearly. We can't communicate in a godly way to one another, through conflict, we're only going to do more damage than good. So we're going to talk about five conflict tactics and we're going to do that on the other side.

[00:00:34] < Intro >

Ryan: Selena Fredrick, I love you so much. You articulated that so well. Yes, the five communication, conflict tactics. We're talking about those today. But why are we talking about those today? Because it's a huge day. It is book release day [Kelly Clarkson's "My Life Would Suck Without You" playing in the background].

Selena: Every time we release a book, if you know, you know.

Ryan: If you know you know, and we're not going to explain the joke. I think it's awesome.

Selena: It's an Easter egg [both laughing]. It's a big fat one that you should-

Ryan: Yes, it's a big day and we like to celebrate and not all celebrations warrant a Kelly Clarkson, but this one does [both laughing]. So here are the books. If you haven't seen these or heard of these; *How a Husband Speaks*, *How a Wife Speaks*. And if you're watching, you can see there's a unified sound bar graphic across the two. Selena what is that? This is your chance to shine. What is it?

Selena: I already shined today but, anyways, it is. Is it 1 John 1?

Ryan: No.

Selena: John 1?

- Ryan:** Yes, there you go.
- Selena:** I can't remember which one is one. It's John 1 being spoken and that is the waves -
- Ryan:** It's the Greek. What's the Greek saying?
- Selena:** In the Greek, sorry. It's the sound waves from the Greek.
- Ryan:** Yes, and what does it say in the Greek?
- Selena:** It says, just give me a second, [reading in Greek]
- Ryan:** Yes, there it is.
- Selena:** There it is.
- Ryan:** "In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, and the word was God." Oh, wait [reading in Greek] So the whole point of that is the word is how God has communicated to us. He's given us His general revelation in the word of creation.
- In other words, the entirety of creation. When He spoke He created and we can see the fingerprints of God throughout creation. I just love it. But we wouldn't have God's decree unless He, then, gave us His, in Scripture, word.
- Selena:** Mm-hmm.
- Ryan:** And, then, as we see in the Person of Christ the incarnate word, that is Christ. And that's what John one is talking about, "In the beginning was the word." So that's why we said that because these books are all about the words that we speak as husband and wife.
- Selena:** Based on the Word of God.
- Ryan:** Amen. And, so, we've taken a very heart-oriented approach with these books. In that it is practical, but we don't get into the classic conversations around communication. So in order to cover those bases we created this resource, and this is free. It's called a primer on marital communication styles and conflict tactics. That's what we're talking about today. We talked about communication styles last week.
- Selena:** Yes.
- Ryan:** Today we're covering the second piece, which is conflict tactics. And this graphic, it ships with the books, like I said, but it just has a primer because we

don't want to leave you without this baseline, sort of, understanding of communication dynamics.

And, so, we're going through that today. But before we do that, if you don't know who we are. Sunny is here, she's talking as well. If you don't know who we are, I'm Ryan and this is my lovely, lovely wife, Selena.

Selena: You are so sweet.

Ryan: And we are The Fierce Family on YouTube and or Fierce Marriage podcast on Tuesdays. Fierce Parenting podcast that goes out on Thursdays. And, yes, we do this we spend our lives just encouraging couples to live marriage, live the family life, in light of the full counsel of God, in light of the gospel. So that's it, that's my intro.

Oh, I want to say thank you to a new patron this last week, her name's Kayla. Welcome, Kayla. Thank you for joining the army of fierce proprietors, the elite, the special forces who are holding the line for flourishing family orthodoxy in our insane culture. So five communication tactics.

Now, these are going to be standard tactics, and it has to do with, actually, I can use it, I think [Inaudible 00:04:23] have it in print. Again, last week we talked about there being X-Y axis. You have the flexibility axis on the X axis, and you have sensitivity.

Selena: Well, we were talking about communication styles last week. And, so, there was a graph on the X-axis across flexibility, and then on the Y-axis, up and down, sensitivity. So the more flexible you are, well, it depends on what kind of communicator you are. What your style is.

Ryan: Yes, you have to go back and watch that video or listen to that episode. But this, similarly, has an X-Y axis, and here it is. On the Y you've got emphasis on outcome, meaning that you care. You emphasize what happens as a result of this conflict. Versus the X-axis, which is emphasis on relationship. I mean, what do you weigh most, and to what extent do you weigh that thing during conflict?

Selena: During conflicting, yes.

Ryan: For example, if you really emphasize relationship. I mean, the thing that matters the most to you is just "I just want peace." Then you're going to avoid conflict.

Whereas if you have a low emphasis on the relationship and you have a high emphasis on being right. Then you're going to be competitive in that conflict and you're going to want to right, at the expense of the relationship.

- Selena:** Yes.
- Ryan:** So we'll talk through this here. Let's start with the first one, and we'll start with this big statement. How a couple handles conflicts is a combination of their individual emphases on relationship and outcome. Ultimate outcomes are a function of which tactics both spouses deploy. So how the conflict unfolds is going to be a function of what tactics I use and what tactics you use.
- Selena:** Are some of those related to your communication style as well? Is that why, if I'm more of a feeler, I wonder if it correlates to how accommodating I will be to the relationship instead of?
- Ryan:** That's a good question. I'm sure that the underlying personality traits-
- Selena:** Might inform some of that.
- Ryan:** ...will inform this. But also if you are following this and level of complication, and where you're at in the actual conflict, and what's at stake could really change the dynamics of the conflict. I would say that there's-
- Selena:** A correlation, but maybe not a strong line, a strong direct line to draw.
- Ryan:** Yes, because conflicts can be varying. If it's just like I'm upset because you got toothpaste all over the sink. That's a different type of conflict versus I'm upset because there's been a betrayal of trust. So it's going to be handled differently.
- Selena:** Right, it's probably going to stir up some different tactics inside of you.
- Ryan:** Yes, so as we go through this, listener, here's what we'd like you to consider. What is your go-to conflict tactic? As we're going through these, try to think, objectively, about yourself as well as you can, and ask yourself why. Why is that your go-to conflict tactic?
- The next thing you to consider is which emphasis can you increase? In other words, can you increase your emphasis on outcome or can you increase your emphasis on relationship? Because there is an optimal solution here, and it's when both are high on both.
- Meaning we're both wanting the right outcome. We're also both wanting to sustain the relationship through this conflict. If we can do that, then we can have the highest win, win, win.
- Selena:** Win, win, win.
- Ryan:** I win by mediating a win a successful agreement.
- Selena:** Yes.

Ryan: So let's start with the first one, compete. So I'll put the graphic up, so you can see them all in their various places on the X-Y axis.

Selena: Well, and we can describe them, too. So on the axis, the compete one is, like you talked about, the emphasis is on the outcome. So you are probably wanting to win, I'll say.

Ryan: You have a high emphasis on outcome and low emphasis on relationship.

Selena: So you're going to win at any cost, even if it hurts your spouse in the process. And, honestly, I do think spouses, I don't think they intentionally mean to do this.

I do think we have to recognize that, "Oh, gosh, there's a competitive drive in me that doesn't want to admit when I'm wrong or be wrong. Even if I'm right, though, I can't always shove it in their face and be like, "I win, I'm right, you're wrong." That's not going to be a healthy tactic to deploy during conflict.

Ryan: So that's the first one. First tactic compete. Are you a competitor with your spouse, or are you something else? The second one we'll talk about is avoid. Conflict tactic number two. So this is low on both. So you're low on emphasis on outcome. You're also low on emphasis on relationship. So you would prefer, if you're an avoider, to sweep it under the rug. You'd rather do that than deal with it.

Selena: Well, and I think we call these peacekeepers, not peacemakers, we've done some episodes on that. Where we just try to keep the peace. We don't actually deal with the conflict. We just, like you said, sweep it under the rug or address it. We don't want to shake up the dynamics. We're just trying to keep the peace.

But, it's funny, because the one thing that will bring peace is often diving into the conflict, figuring out. Not being afraid to get rid of the peace, for a moment, because what you have really isn't peace, at that point.

Ryan: Yes, and this is the most passive stance you can take.

Selena: You're just acquiescing, yes.

Ryan: If this is you, I would encourage you to think introspectively. Meaning that you're actually showing very little regard for your relationship, if you're not willing to deal with this stuff. You're showing very little regard for just the quality of life that you're building with your spouse. If your default is to avoid talking about stuff.

And, so, are you an avoider? And when a conflict arises... Now, if you are an avoider, the questions to ask are, "Okay, how can I best love my spouse?" That's the first one, "In the middle of this conflict. And how can I be a good steward of our marriage in the middle of this conflict?"

Selena: Yes, and why do I avoid it? We talked about that. Why would you be this person? I think, sometimes, you can look at your family of origin. You can look at your communication style and what you hold close. But "Why do I want to avoid things, why am I afraid, or why do I just get frustrated and blow it off because I don't want to deal with it?"

Ryan: I think because, on some level, you would rather avoid conflict at all costs because you dislike conflict that much.

Selena: Right, and I think it's an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to help us recognize that in us, and lead us out of it.

Ryan: And we're called, in some sense, to a holy conflict. In other words, we're called to repent of our sin. We're called to call others to repentance when sin is present, especially, within marriage. And to do so lovingly with not a heart of self-righteousness, but a heart of caring truly for somebody.

So number one, competitiveness or compete. Number two, avoidance. Number three accommodation. Accommodation. So this is on the axis, again, looking at the grid. High on relationship, very low on outcome. Someone who tends to be accommodating, puts a low emphasis on the outcome and a high emphasis on relationship. It's in the peacekeeping side. But it's peacekeeping for different reasons.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: Whereas one wants to keep the peace by avoiding the conflict, altogether, because conflict is the enemy. Whereas the accommodator, they're afraid of losing closeness with their spouse. So they'll give ground where they, maybe, shouldn't give ground.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: Meaning that they deemphasize outcome for relational peace. Now, this can be in positive way, it could be a way to serve one another. But it also can lead to one spouse being a doormat.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: It's a sin, I would say, of passivity. Meaning that when the judgment was brought down in Genesis 3, the order was distorted and God said the wife's

desire will be for her husband and he will rule over her. Now, in light of that, she could be a helper in the God ordained way. That is supportive, and has a backbone, and is speaking up, when speaking up is necessary, in a Godly loving way.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: Or she can undermine, in an aggressive way, undermine his authority, or she can undermine in a passive way. In other words, just be a doormat, you're relegating your role. Now, that's on the wife's side.

Husbands can also be overly accommodating in the sense they're relegating their responsibility to lead with conviction, with backbone. And instead, they just want their wife to, basically, just "be okay" at whatever cost, and be okay is in quote fingers. Because it's, well, are you really okay if you're being allowed to be dysfunctional in-

Selena: Right, you don't really care about the relationship, as much as you probably say you do.

Ryan: Right. So those are all the negative ones, and, now, we're going to get into two more positive ones, just as a recap. Number one tactic is compete. Number two is avoid. Number three is accommodate. Now number four compromise.

Selena: Compromise, yes.

Ryan: What's this one?

Selena: So I guess the plus is that it's a reasonable middle ground reached by both parties. So both spouses giving something up as it can lead to, and I think this is, probably, the negative side, like a tit-for-tat negotiation. Like, "Well, if you do this then I'll do that."

Or "If you give me this girl's weekend, I'll give you the guy's weekend." And it's better than low emphasis tactics, but it's still not the ideal.

Ryan: Yes, so you're emphasizing in a middle-

Selena: You're compromising to get what you want basically, right?

Ryan: Right. Yes, well, and you're emphasizing in a medium way. You care a little bit about outcome, you also care a little bit about relationship. Not a little bit, but it's not foremost, it's also not in the background, it's both.

It's like you're figuring out how to both get what you want because you both care about outcome, you both care about your relationship. Now, this is better

than the other three that we just mentioned. But, yes, like you just said, it can lead to scorekeeping.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: Meaning, "I let you have this, now you owe me."

Selena: Right.

Ryan: "I compromised there and you compromised a little bit. But I compromised more, so now you owe me."

Selena: You can see where this can get very messy and it won't, actually, result in the outcome that you're hoping for [chuckles].

Ryan: Yes, well, I mean-

Selena: You might get a piece of it and, I think, you might even get it. But you might get it at what cost? Because it's not the best.

Ryan: Yes, I want to use an example.

Selena: There you go.

Ryan: So, say I want to go see a movie with a friend. It's guys' night, movie night, whatever. That means that you're at home with the kids, and that I'm also not there, which is we're not having a family night. You're also holding down the fort, which is extra work for you. And we love our kids, and we love parenting our kids as a team.

But if we're using the compromise tactic, I'll say, "All right, so I really want to go do this. And I remember you saying you wanted to go do the other thing on Saturday, so I'll do this then you can do that right now."

Selena: Right, it seems harmless, I think. It seems harmless, "Oh, well, everybody gets what they want." But it's, again, the heart orientation. It's questioning the motive and what patterns are you beginning to instill into how you communicate to one another, and how you go through conflict?

Ryan: Right.

Selena: You get what you want, I get what I want, and everybody's happy. Well, not really.

Ryan: It becomes a negotiation. Everything becomes a negotiation and, yes, negotiations and contracts tend to go really well together. And if so if your

marriage is more on the contract side, as opposed to the covenantal side, then you might be thinking in these terms.

The problem is, and this is I think the biggest problem is, this gets us thinking in terms that have to do with how well my spouse helps me get what I want. And how well this relationship actually benefits me.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: In other words-

Selena: You're just creeping into the selfishness. Creeping out of the sacrificial love and creeping into the selfishness, which is not love at all.

Ryan: Right.

Selena: Sorry, what were you going to say?

Ryan: I was going to say, say you're not willing to compromise. Now, if I'm used to compromise and I'm used to that being the way that we solve conflict. So I have two choices now. I have to either compete with you or I have to accommodate you.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: So I have not built skills that have to do with, I think, covenantal love. Meaning that I'm not learning to give sacrificially to you. I'm learning to give to you in exchange-

Selena: So that I can get.

Ryan: Yes. I tend to think compromise is, generally, a bad thing.

Selena: It's incomplete, to me. Yes, it's incomplete.

Ryan: Yes, now, again, it has to do with the nature of the conflict.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: So you want to go to the fifth one?

Selena: Sure.

Ryan: Okay, fifth one, collaborate. Now, this is the win-win-win scenario.

Selena: Yes, I'm sorry. I guess I'm trying to think of the difference. When you were talking about the movie example, it depends on what it is. If you're going to

have guys' day out, you're going to do Bible study, you're going to have to sit by the campfire. You're going to talk about some godly things, and we're going to check in with one another.

I'm like, "Yes, I will hold down the fort as long as it needs to be held down because this is ministry. This is eternal work." When it comes to hobbies and having fun, which are also important, and I think this is where the collaborative part comes in.

Because you do have to collaborate with your spouse because, so quickly, I can see my own heart sliding into the tit-for-tat, the competitiveness, the avoidance. Everything that I want to accommodate, but I'm going to have to compromise. But why do I have to compromise? He should compromise.

You can see how the snowball effect begins, unless you have this optimal posture of collaboration within your marriage. So what is that? Talk to me.

Ryan: Well, I'll use another example, say the economies of the home. So food, dishes, laundry, the house. That's a source of conflict for a lot of couples because there's a lot of tension there. There's a lot of needed effort there. There's usually a scarcity of resources, time, and energy.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: And, usually, it elevates the tension in the household. If there's chaos in the household, in terms of just things needing to get done that aren't done. And, so, how would you have a collaborative approach in that sense of conflict? So if I'm being competitive, as a husband, whatever our thing is, whatever our agreement is.

I'm going to hold fast to that agreement, and I'm not going to have any regard for what, emotionally, my wife is going through. What relationally effect it has on us. I'm going to say, "We've talked about this."

Selena: Yes, "You said you were going to do this."

Ryan: "And you said you're going to do this and you didn't do this." And you can say the same for me, in terms of the work that I bring to the household, and the things that I do. "You said you would fix that doorknob."

"You said you would do X, Y or Z, you haven't done it."

And, so, you can either compete and say, "I'm going to win this and I don't care how it affects you."

Selena: Right.

Ryan: Whether that's a chore or whatever. Now, collaborative approach is one where we say, "All right, wife."

And you say, "Okay, husband."

"We can agree that this is not optimal. We can agree that it's maybe functioning, it's working, but it's not working in the best way it can be. So how can we work together as husband and wife to accomplish the optimal outcome that we both desire? And that is a home that is filled with peace, a home that is organized and functional, and it serves our family well.

It helps us fulfill our family mission more efficiently. We can have people over more readily. If we're not always living in chaos. How can we do that together?" And that's where you begin to collaborate. Like last night-

Selena: Yes, I was feeling overwhelmed by just dishes and laundry in our home. When the weather is nice here we are outside, and what happens in the house, it becomes a drop point.

You just drop whatever you came home with, and then you pack up the next bag and go to the next thing. And, so, summer can be really challenging, I think, in terms of order in our house. Because we're like, "We don't want to miss the nice weather by doing chores inside."

So last night, all that to say, you stepped up and said, "I've got the kitchen, I'll clean the kitchen, and I've got dinner." And I was just like, "Oh, my goodness, thank you." Because it is hard. It's hard to get that done. You can see she's at that stage where she doesn't really want to be put down.

And, so, doing dishes with her can be a little more challenging, but not impossible. And he just really stepped up and it's helped me love you more, just kidding.

Ryan: That's funny, because I felt like I won.

Selena: Yes, see, this is optimal.

Ryan: This is optimal. Because I'm like, "I can wrap my head around..." The dishes were piled up. It was like three or four days' worth of dishes. We had been gone.

Selena: It wasn't that many. We've had more.

Ryan: And we had a lot of stuff happen.

Selena: We've had more. It was a lot.

- Ryan:** It took me an hour and a half, which is long for us.
- Selena:** For dishes, yes.
- Ryan:** But I'm like, "I don't have to deal with all the stuff that she's doing." I'm happy to take this off your plate because, frankly, laundry does not compute for me. It's the quickest way for me to lose my soul. You'd, probably, say the same thing.
- Selena:** Well, he just can't deal with the obscurity of some of the pieces of laundry clothes.
- Ryan:** Well they are little girl's clothes, they all look the same. Is that a sock? Is that a shirt? Pants? I don't know. It's an article of clothing.
- Selena:** Which is fine because, yes, I will happily deal with some laundry and the messes that are piling up upstairs, that would be awesome, and you are freeing me up to do this. So, yes, there's some collaboration there. We're both getting to do what we want, and that's not always the case. But, again, that's some sacrificial love there. So it could have been seen, I think, a bit as a compromise, but not really.
- Ryan:** Well, it worked well because now I'm doing the thing that I offered to do.
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** I know that it's blessing you and I now get to have the joy of serving you in that way and, also, in a very tangible way that serves our household.
- Selena:** Yes, and it resets me being able to, "Okay, now, we can try to do this again and not make such a mess all the time, and prioritize our home before we leave the home." There's just rhythms and things that we're working through.
- Ryan:** So there you have it. Conflict tactic one, compete. Number two, avoid. Number three, accommodate. Number four, compromise. Number five, collaborate.

Now, of course, with all of these, there are going to be caveats, in terms of what actually you're dealing with. In terms of the conflict you're actually facing. And, so, we would say if you're dealing with something heavy like infidelity, or an addiction, or some sort of bomb that's been dropped in your life. Whether that's because of a moral failing or because some external factor being imposed on you, you need pastoral care.

You need Christian relationships. Somebody who's going to walk alongside you in a discipleship capacity, point you to Christ, remind you of Scripture, remind

you of our heart orientations. Be able to look at your blind spots and reveal them to you.

Selena: Well, and there's an order to healing that pastors and counselors can know, and they can lead you through.

Ryan: Yes, so we encourage you to do that. And, on that note, if you're not a Christian, if you don't know who Jesus is. Or you've heard the name of Christ, but you don't really understand why He's so great, or what He did, or why people call themselves Christians?

We want you to know Jesus. He's the way, the truth, and the life. This world that we live in is not all there is to reality. We have an eternal something in us and that has to be accounted for, and Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.

So if you don't know Him, find a Christian friend, talk to them. Ask them to read Scripture with you. Begin that discipleship journey with them. That's where they teach you the things of God or find a church that teaches out of the Bible. If you don't have either of those things, we have a website for you. It's this, thenewsisgood.com.

Let's pray. Father, God, thank you for the gift of conflict. Even though it's sometimes hard to see the blessings in the middle of the fights. Lord, I pray you'd help us have conflicts with integrity. To have high regard for each other in marriage.

But you'd also help us to have high regard for optimizing the outcomes, that we aren't just trying to get it over with. We're trying to steward our relationship well unto your glory, unto our good, and to the good of our children. So help us, as married couples, to conflict well, in Jesus name, Amen.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: A final reminder, books, they are officially out. You can find those most places where books are sold. Actually, I'll say on our website because we don't worry about the distribution stuff. Other than Amazon you can find them there.

Don't go there, though, go to our website you'll get a better deal and it's faster. I mean, that. *How a Husband Speaks, How a Wife Speaks*, if you want to find those, and you're listening, go to fiercemarriage.com/speak, and we'd love you to have these books.

We hope and pray that they bless you. And, like I said, you'll also get this primer on communication styles and conflict tactics. They ship with every pair of books. So, with that said, this episode of Fierce Marriage is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: We'll see you again in seven days. Until next time—

Selena: Stay fierce.

PODCAST NOTES

- **Referenced scripture**
 - John 1:1
 - Genesis 3

- **Recommended resource**
 - thenewsisgood.com

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