

Ten Questions to Ask after a Nasty Fight

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Picture your last fight. For some of you, it was nasty—maybe something akin to nuclear war where there's total devastation. For others, it was tense and hard, like a mild earthquake, but by the grace of God, you got through it. But now, as you sit back and reflect on *why* you fought, you are just not sure. In the aftermath of an earthquake, you sort through the mess. Windows shattered. Foundations

damaged. But where do you start? Take a moment and use some of the questions below to help you think about what happened in your last fight.

1. **What was the problem/conflict/fight about and when did it happen?** What were the basic facts of the situation—who, where and when? What were you fighting about? You need to get this straight before you can do anything else.
2. **What was each of you coveting, desiring, or hoping for?** James 4:1: “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from the *desires (or passions)* that battle within you?” You know that with every fight, there is something you want. When you are angry or frustrated, you spend so much time focused on the other person that you might forget (or even ignore) the war going on in your own heart. What desires or cravings or hopes rule your heart? *Ruling desires can ruin your relationships.* So get ahold of ungodly ruling desires before they wreak havoc in your life.
3. **What fears, lies, rationalizations, or self-justifications are you wrestling with? Which of these have a grip on your heart?** Fears, lies, rationalizations, or self-justifications will shape and define what you do and say. Repent of these things (James 4:4-10), because they will lead you astray from what God wants.
4. **At what point did you get disappointed, annoyed, frustrated, or angry with your spouse or friend? And, why did you respond that way?** In the midst of the mess created by conflict, you need to consider *your* reaction to your spouse or friend.
5. **Did you really understand the other person’s perspective? Ask that person if he or she feels like you understood him/her?** Solomon warns that the fool is not interested in understanding someone else, but only in stating his or her own opinions (Proverbs 18:2). The fool is impulsive; he answers before he hears (Proverbs 18:13). To sort through a fight, you must understand the other person. If you don’t take the time to understand him or her, you can be misled by your assumptions.
6. **What are your typical rules of engagement in a fight? If you don’t have any, what should they be?** If you are a Christian, slamming doors, screaming, cursing at your spouse or friend, throwing things, walking away, or ignoring others are not acceptable options. A Christian should be defined by grace, kindness, and love, even in the heat of “battle” (1 Corinthians 13:4-6; Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 4:6). Sadly, that’s not true for many Christians. So define your rules of engagement so that if you fight, you can fight *well*.
7. **Have you noticed any patterns—good and bad—in how you handle conflict?** Look for the patterns that characterize your conflicts. Do you scream? Do you pout? Do you make accusations? Do you use exaggerated language—“you *never* come on time” or “you *always* forget”?

8. **What sins do you need to own up to and confess to God and your spouse or friend?** Without repentance, conflict never gets truly resolved. Do you feel grief over your sin? Is it worldly sorrow or godly sorrow? If you feel regret after your conflict, but slip immediately back into the same old patterns of fighting, maybe you are experiencing worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, and *leaves no regret*, but worldly sorrow brings death (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). Are you truly and genuinely grieved over your sin in your conflicts? Or have you grown *comfortable* with your conflicts and with your sin? You might think the conflict is about you and your friend, but ultimately it's about you and God. When you fight with someone, your selfish desires have gotten the best of you (James 3:13). James 3:16 reminds us: "For where you have envy and selfish ambitions, *there you find disorder* and every evil practice." Turn from your sin and turn back to God. After you reconcile with God, go back to the other person and confess your sin to him or her.
9. **When you fight, what helps you to reconcile with each other?** Every couple learns in the midst of fighting what works for them. I know one couple, who after a fight in the morning, start texting each other as soon as they get to work, so that they can work through the different parts of the conflict. By the time they get home in the evening, they've worked through a lot. They desire to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). They are quick to reconcile and keep short accounts. In conflict, what helps you to deal with sin and build greater understanding? Do you initiate reconciliation in the midst of the conflict? If not, why not? Are you willing to humbly compromise, or are you stubborn as a bull with your opinions?
10. **Do you typically apologize to each other and ask for forgiveness?** Reconciliation is not complete until you grant forgiveness to each other. Withholding forgiveness, holding onto grudges, or ignoring the problem is not an option for Christians.

Your forgiveness in Christ was not cheap. After all, blood was shed for your sins. Because of what God has done for you in Christ, you should quickly and freely forgive others (Matthew 18:21-33; Ephesians 4:32). A thoughtful pastor has often reminded me—*forgiven sinners forgive sin*. Verbalize your wrong and take responsibility for it. Ask for forgiveness. Offer restitution if needed. Don't blame the other person—"I'm sorry, but if you hadn't done that..." Focus on your sin only. As you consider these ten questions, remember this is not a step-by-step formal or quick fix for your fights. Heart work is hard work. Be patient, honest, and humble. Ask God to help you. Work through heart issues, mistaken expectations, and sinful patterns of communication. And trust that God can redeem *any* marriage or tense relationship, even yours.

