

COUPLES CONFLICT COMPASS

From **daily altar**

Objective:

The *Couples Conflict Compass* is a simple guide for couples to navigate the challenges of marriage (which we've consolidated to 4 main categories) through prayer, a focus on God's Word, active conversation, and community.

The goal of the conflict compass is not to eliminate conflict altogether (is that even possible?), but rather to provide a framework for navigating it with grace, humility, and a commitment to growing closer together in love and understanding.

① Prenote:

This guide is intended for a Christian couple; however, we are aware that there may be some couples that are new believers or one of the spouses is not a believer; as such, they are not familiar with all the elements of faith, Scripture, Christian vernacular, traditions, etc. This guide may seem elementary for some of the couples who have been believers for years and/or 'grew up' regularly attending church and being active in a faith community. For those couples, we say: be patient. Consider this an opportunity for the two of you to *get back to the basics*.

Suggested Use:

- Block out time (1 hour+) on a weekly basis to work through this guide.
- Designate a quiet place to meet. Sit close together.
- Take turns asking the questions (both of you should be answering the questions).
- Take turns reading the overviews and supporting Bible passages (and the context).
- Take individual notes on key topics, takeaways, action items, etc.
- As a supplemental resource: Order a copy of the book [Daily Altar](#) and read through it together, concurrently with this guide. The book addresses these topics, and more, in greater detail.

Reminders:

1. Relax...breathe...this is not a test or interrogation
2. Grab a pen/pencil, notebook/paper, and your Bible
3. Take it seriously...
4. ...but also have fun
5. Embrace the process (questions & answers/candid discussion, reflection, prayer, etc.)
6. Enjoy the journey 😊

(But first!) Simple Prewrite Exercise



Using the tables below, each of you jot down the first 1 to 3 things that come to mind to the question that follows. Don't overthink it. Write down the first thing(s) that come to mind:

What conflict(s) or reoccurring issue(s) are you facing in your marriage?

Don't talk about your list or share your list. Cover up your answers or print out 2 copies of this page so you can each have your own. Save your answers/sheet in a safe spot.

A few weeks from now, after you've carefully (and prayerfully) worked through the 4 sections of the guide, come back to your answers, and reassess your views of the conflicts or reoccurring issues.

- Do you have a better framework for how to navigate these issues and are willing to work through them, together?
- Do you feel like you can talk more openly about conflict in your marriage?
- Are you more mindful of the spiritual battle(s) that are often happening?

If you can't answer YES to these follow up questions, go back through the guide or reach out to us so we can talk. Perhaps we need to tweak the guide for better outcomes. (Email: danny@altarprenneur.com)

DATE _____

| H I M |
|-------|
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |

DATE _____

| H E R |
|-------|
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |

1. Faith & Values:



Overview: Faith and values—it's this whole mix of what we believe, what we stand for, how we practice spiritual disciplines, and the principles we hold dear, all intertwined within our relationships and communities. It's not always smooth sailing. Sometimes clashes come up because of our different backgrounds—our denominations, customs, upbringing, you name it. It can interfere with our core values and what we deem important for our spiritual growth. And then, throw in parenting styles and relationships where two people come from different faiths, and it's a whole new level of complicated.

But here's the silver lining: God is in this. There is hope and grace, and He gives us His Word to guide us through! So, even when things get messy, there's a way forward. It's about talking it out, really listening, and being willing to meet halfway. We need to lean on God, stay open, humble, and keep the lines of communication open.


Conflict Examples:

- Differences in beliefs or practices: Variances in religious affiliations/denominations, rituals, traditions, observances, spiritual disciplines, etc.
- Values misalignment: Discrepancies in fundamental beliefs about morality, ethics, life principles, worldview, etc.
- Priorities in spiritual growth: Varied approaches or levels of commitment to spiritual development or faith practices.
- Cultural differences: Conflicts arising from differing cultural backgrounds impacting faith and values.
- Attitude towards traditions: Disagreements regarding the importance or relevance of traditional practices within faith or culture.
- Parenting styles: Conflicts concerning how to instill lessons of faith, life, or moral values in children.
- Interfaith relationships: Challenges stemming from being in a relationship with someone from a different religious background.
- Financial stewardship: Differences in attitudes towards money and its relation to faith, such as tithing, charitable giving, or saving.

Tips & Questions:


Communication: Openly discuss your beliefs and values, seeking to understand each other's perspectives with love and respect (📖 Proverbs 27:17). If both of you are believers, it may be simpler because your beliefs and values (should) align. However, it's still a good exercise to carefully work through to solidify and/or evaluate your unity.

1. How effectively are we communicating our beliefs and values to each other? Think of beliefs and values in terms of your views & convictions about God, the world, life/death, marriage, parenting, career, faith, relationships, etc.
2. Are we actively listening and seeking to understand each other's perspectives?
3. How can we improve our communication to foster greater understanding and empathy? For example, if you are currently in a season of life where you're not communicating because you 'have no time', you should begin by assessing your schedule & priorities.


Compromise: Find common ground and areas where you can support each other's spiritual journey without compromising your core beliefs ( Amos 3:3).

4. Where can we find common ground and areas of agreement in our faith and values? (Again, if you are believers, these are/should be aligned.)
5. How can we navigate differences in our beliefs while still respecting each other's core values?
6. Are there areas where we can support each other's spiritual journey without compromising our own beliefs?

For example, if one of you is not a believer, what questions do you have that your spouse can help you navigate? If you are both believers but are not on the same page when it comes to the practice of spiritual disciplines, what needs to change? (Ex. A spouse who is dedicated to gathering with the body of believers, i.e. going to church, and one who is not.)

Prayer: Pray together regularly, seeking God's guidance and unity in your faith journey ( Matthew 18:19-20).

7. How can we change our schedule to make time for (protect) prayer?
8. What are things we should be praying (and fasting) for regularly?
9. What can we do to grow deeper in our prayer life? If you have children, how can you do the same with your children?

 **Resource:** [HERE](#) is a free eBook that can help you build a consistent (family) altar, especially if you're new to this.

2. Communication:



Overview: Let's talk about how we communicate in our relationships, especially in marriage. Whether you've been married 20 weeks or 20 years, you know, it's not just about what we say, it's about how we say it and what emotions/signals we give off without even speaking. But for now, let's focus on the verbal communication.

Verbal communication covers a lot of ground. We're talking about how we talk to each other, our unique ways of communicating, those heart-to-heart talks that really bond us (we call them our 'couch talks'), even the silly arguments that can get out of hand if we don't address them promptly. And let's not forget those moments when we don't quite get each other because we're not being clear or we're leaving things hanging.

When life gets seriously stressful, that's when talking can get hard. We've got to make an effort to really hear each other out, no interruptions, and set aside some dedicated time just for listening. It's about trying to see where the other person's coming from before we lay out our own perspective (or a solution). Forgiveness and showing each other grace are key. We need to follow Christ's example, the ultimate example!

Sometimes things get messy. When we hit those rough patches and it feels like we're stuck, it's okay to reach out for some outside help. Whether it's talking to mentors, a pastor, or even a counselor, getting a fresh perspective can help. And let's not forget about building up our support squad. Having deep friendships that get what we're going through can make a world of difference in our relationship. But as Scripture tells us, be sure to seek wise counsel (Proverbs 24:6).

So, bottom line? Communication isn't always easy, but it's worth putting in the effort. Let's keep talking, listening, forgiving, and leaning on God.

Conflict Examples:

- Differences in communication styles (Ex. One's an *avoider*, the other is a *communicator*)
- Arguments over *trivial matters (Ex. Dishes, driving habits, idiosyncrasies, etc.)
- Misunderstandings due to unclear or unfinished communication
- Lack of effective communication during stressful times
- Disagreements about frequency or mode of communication (Ex. text vs. phone call vs. face-to-face; Morning vs. evening vs. weekend, etc.)

*Be careful and watchful: *Trivial* matters can become major if not addressed appropriately and in a timely manner.

Tips & Questions:

Active Listening: Practice active listening without interrupting, seeking to understand before being understood (📖 James 1:19).

1. Are we truly listening to each other without interrupting? Think of recent examples from discussions you've had.
2. Do we make/schedule time to listen to each other? Blocking off time on the calendar will help. It's not about having time it's about making time.
3. How can we practice patience and attentive listening during discussions or disagreements?

➔ **Exercise:** This week, during your next discussion, each of you practice the art of attentive listening. Don't speak/respond until the other person has finished speaking. Look each other in the eyes. Repeat the main points of what they said to make sure you understood correctly.

Grace & Forgiveness: Extend grace and forgiveness to one another as Christ forgave us (📖 Colossians 3:13).

4. Are we willing to extend grace and forgiveness to each other, even in challenging moments (*especially* in challenging moments)?
5. How can we emulate Christ's forgiveness in our relationship?
6. Are there any past conflicts that we need to forgive each other for in order to move forward?

📖 **Resource:** [ARTICLE](#) on what forgiveness is/is not

Seeking Counsel: Don't hesitate to seek wise counsel from mentors, pastors, or counselors when conflicts seem insurmountable (📖 Proverbs 15:22).

7. Are there unresolved conflicts or challenges in our relationship that we're finding difficult to navigate on our own?
8. Do we feel comfortable seeking guidance from mentors, pastors, or counselors when needed? How can we overcome any hesitations or reservations about seeking outside help when facing significant challenges?
9. Do we have friends that we can be ourselves with? (Note: You don't need many friends, you need good & Godly friends.)

3. Roles & Responsibilities:



Overview: When we think about marriage, we come back to this idea that we're all made by God with equal value and dignity, but we have different roles & responsibilities. There's a whole mix of things we're supposed to handle together, from the everyday items like who does the dishes or laundry to the big decisions about money and raising a family.

And it's not just about splitting up chores or making choices. It's about being there for each other in all of it. That's what we think servant leadership is all about—being there, and giving yourself, for your partner...as Christ did for the Church (see Ephesians 5:25-33).

But it's not always smooth sailing, right? We've got our strengths and weaknesses, and sometimes it's about figuring out how to balance them out. That's where compromise comes in. We've got to find ways to meet in the middle, to make sure both of us feel heard and respected.

Sometimes it's about realizing when one of us is carrying more weight than the other. It's about being real with each other, admitting when things aren't quite balanced, and working together to fix it up.

We're in this together, through the valleys and on the mountaintops. And as long as we keep showing up for each other, with patience and love, God will help us *grow through* whatever we *go through*!

Conflict Examples:

- Household chores: The ongoing debate over who does what tasks around the house and how frequently they're done.
- Decision-making: Conflicts arise when one partner feels their input is not valued or when there's disagreement on major decisions like where to live or how to invest money.
- Financial responsibilities: Budgeting, spending habits, who contributes what portion to savings or expenses, etc.
- Childcare and parenting: Parenting styles, discipline methods, the division of responsibilities in caring for children, etc.
- Extended family and social obligations: Conflicts can stem from differing expectations regarding how much time and effort should be spent with extended family members or attending social events.
- Career and personal goals: Struggles may arise when one partner's career ambitions clash with the other's desire for more time together or differing personal aspirations.
- Time management and leisure activities: Disagreements may occur over how leisure time is spent, with one partner feeling neglected if the other spends too much time on personal hobbies or activities.

Tips & Questions:

Servant Leadership: Embrace servant leadership as modeled by Jesus, serving each other with humility and love (📖 Philippians 2:3-4).

1. How can we embody the principles of servant leadership in our relationship?

📖 **Resource:** [ARTICLE](#) on qualities of a servant leader

2. In what ways can we serve each other with humility and love in our daily tasks and decision-making? (Think: *Practical* - dishes, cleaning, house projects, etc.; *Spiritual* – the practice of spiritual disciplines; *Financial* – Biblical stewardship, saving, giving, etc.)
3. Are there areas where one of us is consistently serving more than the other? How can we balance this out?

Teamwork: Approach tasks and responsibilities as a team, recognizing each other's strengths and weaknesses (📖 Ephesians 5:21).

➔ **Exercise:** Make a list (2 columns for each of you) of your strengths and weaknesses.

4. How can we approach household chores, decision-making, and financial responsibilities as a unified team? What are other areas of responsibility that we need to align on?
5. What are each other's strengths and weaknesses when it comes to handling different responsibilities (refer to your list from the exercise)?
6. How can we leverage each other's strengths to effectively manage our roles and responsibilities?

Compromise: Be willing to compromise and find solutions that honor both spouses' needs and contributions (📖 1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

7. When we encounter disagreements over household chores, decision-making, or financial responsibilities, how can we find solutions that honor both of our needs and contributions?
8. Are there areas where we struggle to compromise? How can we overcome these challenges?
9. How can we practice patience, kindness, and humility as we navigate compromises in our relationship?

4. Family & Lifestyle:



Overview: Managing family and lifestyle involves balancing multiple responsibilities, from figuring out how to parent to divvying up chores and finding time for work, family, faith, and fun. It's about navigating through all the different relationships within your extended family while keeping things tight knit at home. That means sticking together in how you raise the kids, making sure you spend real quality time together, and trying to keep a balance in everything you do.

Talking openly about your parenting goals, having each other's backs, and making sure you're on the same page as the kids grow up and start noticing more is critical. And carving out meaningful moments together, nurturing those bonds, and showing love and commitment are key ingredients for keeping the family strong.

On top of all that, making sure you're looking after your spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being—is crucial for keeping harmony at home. Remember, God made us with body, soul, and spirit and He cares about all three! (See 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Luke 10:27)

Conflict Examples:

- Parenting styles: Disagreements over disciplinary methods, educational philosophies, and approaches to instilling values in children.
- Managing time between family and career: Struggles to balance work obligations with family commitments, leading to feelings of neglect or resentment.
- Leisure activities: Conflicts arise when family members have differing interests or preferences for how to spend recreational time together.
- Extended family dynamics: Challenges in managing relationships with in-laws, siblings, or other relatives, especially when differing expectations or communication styles are involved.
- Household responsibilities: Disputes over the division of chores, financial responsibilities, and overall contributions to maintaining the household.
- Quality time vs. quantity time: Differences in opinion regarding what constitutes meaningful time spent together as a family versus simply being physically present.
- Life transitions: Conflicts arising from major life changes such as moving, job loss, illness, or the addition of a new family member.


Tips & Questions:

Unity in Parenting: In our parenting journey, let's be unified, making decisions together and offering unwavering support for each other's roles in raising our children (📖 Proverbs 22:6)


1. Are we communicating effectively about our parenting goals and approaches? Do we even have goals or pillars for our parenting?

 **Resource:** [HERE](#) is a simple sample of parenting goals


2. How can we ensure that we're reflecting unity to our children?
3. Are we supporting each other's parenting roles and decisions?
4. Are there areas where we need to align our parenting styles more closely? For example, in the areas of discipline or encouragement.

Prioritize Time: Prioritize quality time together as a couple and as a family, nurturing your relationships ( Ephesians 5:25-28).


5. How are we currently prioritizing quality time together as a couple and as a family? For example, do you pray, sing, read the Bible, or have dinner together on a regular basis?

 **Resource:** [HERE](#) is why consistency and prioritizing spiritual disciplines matters

6. What activities can we implement to nurture our relationships?
7. Are we carving out enough time for meaningful connection amidst our busy schedules? Intimacy in any area of life doesn't just happen. It takes effort and consistency.
8. How can we better demonstrate love and commitment to each other, as suggested in Ephesians 5:25-28?

Balance: Strive for balance in all areas of life, seeking God's guidance in setting priorities and boundaries ( Matthew 6:33).

9. In what areas of our lives do we feel imbalance or overwhelm?
10. Are there any aspects of our lives where we're neglecting our spiritual, emotional, or physical well-being? Are we practicing spiritual disciplines? Are we nurturing physical and emotional intimacy? Do we eat healthy, sleep well, and live an active lifestyle?
11. What adjustments can we make to achieve greater balance and harmony in our family life?

 **Resource:** [HERE](#) is a guide that you can use to identify activities in your daily schedule that waste time and create more opportunities to meet with God.

Lighthearted Endnotes

They say a wife and husband,
Bit by bit,
Can rear between themselves a mighty wall,
So thick they cannot speak with ease through it,
Nor can they see across it, it stands so tall.

Its nearness frightens them, but each alone,
Is powerless to tear its bulk away; and each
Dejected wishes he had known
For such a wall, some magic thing to say.

So let us build with master art, my dear,
A bridge of love between your life and mine,
A bridge of tenderness, and very near,
A bridge of understanding, strong and fine,
Till we have formed so many lovely ties,
There never will be room for walls to rise.

(Source Unknown)

A husband can:

- Back off (give her some space).
- Be patient (don't rush things).
- Love her as you love your own body (that's going to take some work).
- Affirm her role in the family (whether she stays home or works outside the home, she's got the most important job in the world).
- Pray for her as you've never prayed before (because God hears our prayers).
- Lower your expectations (you're not going to see fireworks every night).
- Do the little things (without expecting anything in return).
- Show her she's the most cherished woman on earth (she'll probably faint the first time you do this).
- Above all, persevere (you're in this for the long haul).

(*Daddy's Home*, by Greg Johnson and Mike Yorkey)