LESSON THREE - Conflict Resolution

“And be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Purpose:
To help students understand how to address and manage conflict with roommates and friends in a useful and constructive way.

Preparation:
1. This lesson is designed to be approximately 20 minutes unless more time is available.
2. Seek the spirit in deciding which sections to emphasize. It is not critical that you cover all the material provided.
4. Consider the needs of the participants and prepare additional questions that promote discussion and connect the principles to apartment and family life.
5. Be prepared to bear your testimony throughout the lesson at any time the spirit prompts.

Doctrine

• Satan is the father of contention and stirs up the hearts of men to contend with one another (see 3 Nephi 11:29).
• Address conflict face-to-face, “between thee and him alone” (see Matthew 18:15).
• “Ye ought to forgive one another . . . of you it is required to forgive all men” (see D&C 64:9-10).
• “First cast the beam out of thine own eye, then thou shalt see clearly . . .” (see Luke 6:41-42).

Discussion

SECTION ONE
Seek to Understand

“He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

“Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away” (3 Nephi 11:29–30).

Question for discussion:
• What is the difference between conflict and contention?

“I have concluded that perhaps one of the principal reasons we fail to relate appropriately with [one another] is because we fail to apply some basics of personal communications. In Hebrews 13:16 we read, ‘But to do good and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.’ Communications in the [apartment] will often be a sacrifice because we are expected to use our time, our means, our talent, and our patience to impart, share, and understand” (Marvin J. Ashton, “Family Communications,” Ensign, May 1976, 52).

Activity: Skill Building

Write or copy the following quotations and give them to several members of the group to read and discuss overcoming conflict through positive communication skills.

Open Communication

“As hard as it is to form the words, be swift to say, “I apologize, and please forgive me,” even though you are not the one who is totally at fault. True love is developed by those who are willing to readily admit personal mistakes and offenses.

“When differences do arise, being able to discuss and resolve them is important, but there are instances when it is best to take a time-out. Biting your tongue and counting to ten or even a hundred is important. And occasionally, even letting the sun go down on your wrath can help bring you back to the problem in the morning more rested, calm, and with a better chance for resolution.

“Any intelligent couple will have differences of opinion. Our challenge is to be sure that we know how to resolve them” (Joe J. Christensen, “Marriage and the Great Plan of Happiness,” Ensign, May 1995, 64).

Controlling Emotions

“It was said of old that ‘a soft answer turneth away wrath’ (Prov. 15:1) . . . . discussions about challenges should be conducted in a respectful way, without loud arguments or contention. We seldom get into trouble when we speak softly. It is only when we raise our voices that the sparks fly and tiny molehills become great mountains of contention.”

For Facilitators: Role Play

Assign roles to the participants and give them information both about their character and about the situation to be enacted. A role play need not be more than two to three minutes. After the role play, lead the class in a debriefing of the experience and the insights gained.
“The voice of heaven is a still small voice; likewise, the voice of domestic peace is a quiet voice” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “Except the Lord Build the House …” Ensign, June 1971, 72).

Avoid ‘pinpricking’
“Don’t be too critical of each other’s faults. Recognize that none of us is perfect. We all have a long way to go to become as Christ-like as our leaders have urged us to become.

“‘Ceaseless pinpricking’ (as President Kimball called it), can deflate almost any [relationship]. Generally, each of us is painfully aware of our weaknesses, and we don’t need frequent reminders. Few people have ever changed for the better as a result of constant criticism or nagging. If we are not careful, some of what we offer as constructive criticism is actually destructive. At times it is better to leave some things unsaid” (Joe J. Christensen, “Marriage and the Great Plan of Happiness,” Ensign, May 1995, 46).

Listening and Understanding
“In [apartment] discussions, differences should not be ignored, but should be weighed and evaluated calmly. One’s point or opinion usually is not as important as a healthy, continued relationship. Courtesy and respect in listening and responding during discussions are basic in proper dialogue. As we learn to participate together in meaningful associations, we are able to convey our thoughts of love, dependence, and interest” (Marvin J. Ashton, “Family Communications,” Ensign, May 1976, 52).

Questions for discussion:
1. How does blame and gossip escalate conflict?
2. What are the most common sources of conflict in an apartment?
3. How can regular apartment councils and appropriate communication help to address these conflicts?
4. How does the counsel to “never speak loudly with one another” apply to roommates, and how does it prepare us to resolve future marital disagreements?

SECTION TWO
Scenario
Tim, Matt, and Brian are excited for the semester and are getting three new roommates: David, Tanner, and Rob—all three are freshman from different states. As the weeks pass, the freshman roommates regularly leave dishes in the sink. Matt, a senior, also contributes to the mess in the kitchen. Brian is also having trouble with Tanner. He can’t stand that Tanner sleeps all day, blasts his music, and has poor hygiene. Tim and Brian try their best to keep things orderly and the lack of help from their roommates is frustrating.

As a result, Tim and Brian spend as much time as they can away from their roommates. There is a lot of silent tension building in the apartment.

Questions for discussion:
1. How does the counsel to “never speak loudly with one another” apply to roommates, and how does it prepare us to resolve future marital disagreements?
2. What are the most common sources of conflict in an apartment?
3. How can regular apartment councils and appropriate communication help to address these conflicts?
4. How does blame and gossip escalate conflict?

Counsel Together
“Conflicts can be reduced if roommates hold weekly council meetings in addition to the weekly home evening lesson and activity. These meetings can provide training for future family and church councils as well as team building work experiences” (Kathleen Gee, “Roommates: Preparation for Marriage and Family,” BYU-Idaho Forum, July 2001).

“To those not yet married I counsel: those who marry in the hope of forming a permanent partnership require certain skills and attitudes of mind. They must be skillful in adapting to each other; they need capacity to work out mutual problems; they need willingness to give and take in the search for harmony; and they need unselfishness in the highest sort—thought for their partners taking the place of desire for themselves. This is respect. It is part of our quest for the abundant life” (Thomas S. Monson, “In Quest of the Abundant Life,” Ensign, March 1988, 2).

Application
A lesson is not complete until a challenge or invitation is extended which inspires and motivates participants to apply what they have learned. “It’s in the doing, not just the thinking, that we accomplish our goals” (Thomas S. Monson, “A Royal Priesthood,” Ensign, Nov. 2007, 59-61).

As a result of the lesson, each participant should feel an increased desire to change an attitude or behavior and become a stronger disciple of Jesus Christ. Include the following steps as part of the application process:

1. Summarize what has been learned or ask a member of the group to do so.
2. Invite participants to write goals specific to what they have felt and learned. How will they apply the principles to their personal lives and apartment life (including roommate relationships)? How will they act on what they have learned as a means of preparation for marriage and family life? In short, what will they do about what they have learned?
3. Follow-up with participants on goals they have set. Regular and consistent follow-up will increase the likelihood that participants actually execute their plan of action.