

RELATING FACE TO FACE

Conflict and problems are inevitable in a marriage. You have two people with different backgrounds, understandings, fears, expectations, habits and needs coming together to create a mutual relationship. But on top of this you have:

- ◆ Two people who are affected by sin.
- ◆ Two people who do not love perfectly.
- ◆ Two people who can be very selfish and self-protective.

When conflict cannot be resolved, it leads to hurt, frustrations, disappointment, withdrawal, disrespect, and anger.

To Deal or Not to Deal

- Some couples want to resolve the situation without dealing with anything significant.
- Don't make our lives uncomfortable.
- Don't require anything of us that would create some change.
- Dealing with conflict means looking at deeper issues.
- Dealing with conflict means working through some of the pain and hurts in such a way that there can be freedom.
- How we deal with conflict can result in one of two things:

The hurt gets worse, the pain goes deeper, and the frustrations and disappointments become greater.

AND/OR

There is a movement toward oneness.

Most couples don't deal with conflicts, they:

- Never discuss problems.
- Avoid the conflict and pretend it doesn't exist.
- Thrive on conflict and communicate through yelling and screaming as a "normal" part of their relationship.
- Forgive one another on the surface without really dealing with the conflict.

Some Areas of Conflict

Place a check mark next to the areas you struggle within your own marriage.

- Finances
- Disciplining the Children
- Misunderstandings
- Deeper Emotional Needs Habits

Four Patterns that Destroy Oneness

Scott Stanley in his book "A Lasting Promise" identifies four negative patterns of relating that can destroy a relationship.

Many couples ask, "Why focus on the negative? Why not just build the good things in our relationship?" Stanley responds by saying that research shows, "It's the presence of certain negative patterns that can destroy a relationship. Therefore, if you can eliminate or keep to a minimum some key negative patterns, the positive things in your relationship can blossom and grow."

Escalation

- Occurs when partners respond back and forth negatively to each other, continually upping the ante so the conversation gets more and more hostile.
- Negative comments spiral into increasing anger and frustration.
- Partners try to hurt each other by hurling verbal and sometimes physical weapons.
- Hurtful remarks usually focus on the immediate goal of piercing the other as a way to protect oneself.

Reckless words pierce like a sword. - Proverbs 12:18, NIV

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. - Proverbs 15:1, NIV

A fool finds no pleasure in understanding, but delights in airing his own opinions. - Proverbs 18:2, NIV

SOLUTION

One partner BACKS OFF and says something to de-escalate the argument, thus breaking the negative cycle.

Invalidations - Put Downs

- Is a pattern in which one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other.
- It's an attack on character
- Jesus taught strongly against such attacks on the character of another.

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool' will be in danger of the fire of hell. - Matthew 5:22, NIV

Raca is an Aramaic term of contempt, like calling a person worthless or empty-headed. Like saying, "You good for nothing." Or subtly putting down the way our spouse feels. Examples:

- "It's not so bad"
- "Trust the Lord"
- Telling them that feeling fear or frustration is inappropriate.

Solomon described this in Proverbs 25:20 as, "singing songs to a heavy heart."

What we want to hear are encouraging words.

SOLUTION

VALIDATION of feelings

RESPECT for each other's character and feelings.

Negative Interpretations

Occur when one partner consistently believes that the motives of the other are more negative than is really the case.

MIND READING

Occur when you assume you know what your partner is thinking or why he or she did something.

When your mind reading includes negative judgment about the thoughts and motives of your spouse, you may be in real trouble, both in your marriage and spiritual life.

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time, wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. -1 Cor. 4:5, NIV

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? - Luke 6:41-42, NIV

SOLUTION

We are warned to GUARD against the tendency to view or judge others harshly.

We can be WRONG in our assumptions.

We often tend to see what we EXPECT TO SEE.

Withdrawal and Avoidance

Withdrawal

An unwillingness to get into, or stay with, important discussions.

Leaving the room

Subtle as "turning off" or "shutting down."

Avoidance

Reluctance to get into certain discussions.

Emphasis on the attempt to not let the conversation happen in the first place,

Example: Like a Dance

Pursuer - the one who brings issues up for discussion, or calls attention to the need to make a decision,

Withdrawer - the person who tends to avoid these discussions or pulls away during them.

***Why do men and women withdraw or avoid?
Because they do not feel safe to stay in the argument.
They are not emotionally safe.***

SOLUTION

- Don't allow AVOIDANCE to grow.
 - When you don't speak OPENLY and TRUTHFULLY, anger will grow.
 - When ANGER is not dealt with constructively, it gives the DEVIL a toehold in your marriage.
- Ephesians 4:25-27, NIV

Dealing With Conflict

Attack the problem, not the person.

Your spouse isn't the main problem. Instead, share how the behavior or the problem affects you. "You know, when you leave your clothes lying around, it makes me feel unappreciated and taken for granted."

Remember, your partner is not the enemy. Satan is our enemy.

Share feelings.

Sharing feelings can be risky, but it will help build the relationship. Sharing is different from joking or being flippant or lecturing. Sharing is being honest with how you really feel about something.

Guard against misperceptions.

We tend to listen and evaluate what we hear based on our own past experiences- the way our parents communicated with each other. Misperception is one of the biggest reasons for miscommunication.

Deal with negative emotions.

A wife wants a soulmate-someone she can trust. She knocks at the heart of her husband saying she wants to be a part of his life.

Listen without getting defensive.

It's difficult for husbands to share their feelings, therefore they avoid sensitive areas-the thorns and thistles. And if they feel attacked by their wives, they can blame shift. While it's appropriate for a wife to share her feelings, she steps over the line when she starts nagging.

Resolving Conflict

Finally, all of you live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. -1 Peter 3:8-9, NIV

Conflict + Resolution = Intimacy**Stop causing each other pain.**

Go beyond the blaming, the accusations and the hurting of each other.

Stop rehearsing the past.

Not because it isn't significant, but because it cannot be changed. There will never be healing until the husband and/or wife is willing to let go and trust God.

Own up to responsibility.

Keep the focus on yourself, not the other person.

Identify recurring areas of conflict and issues.

Look for patterns. They tend to permeate the relationship in numerous areas, i.e., how the children are raised, how finances are handled, etc. Look for basic issues.

Build some positive experiences.

Sometimes we have so many negative experiences that go so deep that we need to begin recalling positive experiences. Reflect on how you met your spouse-how you fell in love-happy moments.

Take a time out.

Sometimes we feel like we have to solve everything now! If you cannot agree on a point-save it for the counselor. Put it on the shelf and discuss it with someone who can help you understand and sort it out.

Give each other permission to share.

Sometimes listening can be difficult. We get impatient. Perhaps, what he or she is saying sounds like a broken record. But it's important to give our spouse permission to share feelings and struggles.

Minimizing Conflict

Pray together.

This is one of the biggest investments we can make in our marriage [and one of the hardest things to do]. This is the one area that Satan attacks the most.

Prayer brings our hearts together as we petition God. It's hard to pray together because God knows our hearts-He sees our wickedness and He knows when our attitudes aren't right.

Examine your heart.

Not only should we pursue purity toward God, but we should also pursue purity in the way we love our spouse.

Sometimes we need to come to God and confess that our heart isn't pure and ask Him to help with our attitude toward our spouse.

Spend time together in the Word.

Let Him speak to you through His Holy Spirit.

Talk to each other.

Sometimes our lives are so busy, we don't have time for each other.

Make the Lord a third partner in your marriage.

The closer a couple draws to God as individuals, the closer they will be drawn to each other as husband and wife.

Set aside time to be together.

We need to plan ahead. If we don't write it down, it won't happen by itself. It has to be a priority.

Ask for help.

Go to an older couple you respect, go to your pastor or a Christian counselor. A lot of the marriages that end in divorce could have been saved had they only sought counseling early on.

The point at which many couples come in for counseling, is often when they are so frayed and frazzled that it takes a miracle of God to put their lives back together.

Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise. - Proverbs 19:20, NIV

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. - Proverbs 15:22, NIV

When the issue cannot be resolved, and sometimes it cannot be, trust God to work in your spouse.

If it is not a big sin issue and there is no happy medium or compromise, turn it over to the Lord.