

COMMUNICATION & CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Out of hunger for _____ we seek to be close to another individual. Communication is the best avenue to share the thoughts and emotions that draw us closer. But as we get close, we notice _____, irritations and problems. Handled incorrectly, these things prevent communication and limit our intimacy. Handled correctly, such conflicts can be the doorway to greater intimacy.

Great marriages have _____. If two people agree on everything, then one person isn't needed. A mature marriage is not a conflict-free marriage. **The best indicator of a mature marriage is how quickly a couple achieves a healthy resolution to conflict.**

Great marriages are _____; they take a great deal of work. That work is definitely rewarding as the resolution of conflict provides a greater understanding and enjoyment of each other. Detachment occurs when communication breaks down or becomes unhealthy and conflicts are not resolved.

I. DISCOVERING COMMON GROUND

a. We need intimacy.

Why? What is gained from a close, healthy relationship?

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

b. Without intentional effort, growing apart is natural.

Like the law of gravity, this is the natural tendency of marriage. But you must battle against this! Here are a few strategies:

i. Weekly date night

One night a week that both of you can count on as a time to connect. Consistency is the key! (Or one hour of talking daily.)

ii. _____ discussions

iii. Discuss your _____. There are five levels of communication: 1) facts, 2) clichés, 3) opinions, 4) feelings and 5) needs. Try to communicate at levels four and five.

iv. _____ activities (even those you don't like) — a small sacrifice.

c. Conflicts are _____.

Take two individuals from two totally different backgrounds and then have them become "one flesh". This doesn't happen without a few sparks.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." — Proverbs 27:17

- d. Conflict _____ of a poor marriage.
 In fact, no conflict may be an indicator of other issues. Marriage is like mountain biking. If you don't go home with a few scrapes, you haven't really gone all out and experienced the real thrill of the sport! A total lack of conflict may be an indicator of:
- i. A lack of vulnerability
 - ii. A lack of _____
 - iii. Complacency
 - iv. Apathy

However, if you are constantly working through conflict you might consider if you are _____ too much or if you have an unresolved source of conflict.

- e. Dealing with conflict builds intimacy.
 Conflicts will either tear us apart or bring us together. This depends on your attitude.
- i. Seeking understanding of your mate = _____.
 - ii. Seeking your own interests = _____.

II. FIVE COMMON SOURCES OF CONFLICT

a. Pride

Vain conceit = pride.

Pride is linked with _____ and _____.

Humility = respecting others and thinking highly of others. *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*— *Philippians 2:3-4*

- When confronted with a disagreement, what would the humble person do?
- Sometimes we treat our fellow-workers with more respect than our spouse.
- Pride also creates a lack of confidence in our spouse. No room for failure.

b. Insecurity in your relationship/low self-esteem

- i. These feelings are often rooted in feeling unloved or not valued.
- ii. This can create conflict, especially if the only source for _____ and _____ is your spouse. Selfishness can breed here.
- iii. This results in draining your spouse.

c. Unmet needs

- i. A relationship that does not experience true companionship does not meet the need that God created it to meet.
- ii. A lack of intimacy in a marriage can be more _____ than at any other time in your life.

d. You feel unsafe to _____.

- i. If your conflict resolution and communication patterns are destructive, your spouse can become hesitant to share his/her feelings or needs. This results in aloneness and frustration.
 - ii. Individuals who feel unsafe to communicate can feel that they are not allowed to be themselves, which is a major source of frustration.
- e. The past
 - i. Don't dredge up dirt on each other.
This indicates a lack of _____ and it can affect every area of your life, including your relationship with God. *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."* — Matthew 5:23-24
 - ii. Learn to forgive while at the same time striving to understand each other's past — including your family upbringing.

III. THE "RULES OF ENGAGEMENT"

- a. The strongest patterns for conflict resolution in our marriage are the ones that were _____, not _____. We typically adopt patterns that we were exposed to by our parents. This is not always good.
- b. The point is not to _____ anger. Anger is not the problem. It is possible to be angry and not sin. Jesus became angry with the moneychangers and he drove them out of the temple. The problem is the focus of our anger and how we deal with it.

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold . . . Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." — Ephesians 4:25-32

IV. TWO REALLY BAD WAYS TO HANDLE CONFLICT

- a. The Way of the Turtle
 - i. The turtle handles the anger that results from conflict by withdrawing into a shell. The turtle hopes that the situation will eventually go away and correct itself.
 - ii. This is _____ and it never accomplishes anything. The hurt gets buried and will eventually come back to the surface.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, — Ephesians 4:15a
- b. The Way of the Skunk
 - i. The skunk handles the anger that results from conflict by spraying all over the place, and then there is a big stink for days! The heart of this response is _____, an actual desire to hurt.

- ii. Verbal abuse is common and it is devastating; WORDS HURT! Rash words are like the thrust of a sword (Proverbs 12:18). We can kill one another slowly with our words.

Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! — Psalm 141:3

V. EIGHT HARMFUL A.R.G.U.M.E.N.T. TECHNIQUES (sure-fire ways to sever intimacy)!

- a. **Accuse your mate.**
Accusations are only good for _____ the fire.
“As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.” — Proverbs 26:21
- b. **Remember past offenses.**
We need to learn how to acquire _____.
“He who covers over an offense promotes love.” — Proverbs 17:9
- c. **Guess your mate’s intentions.**
Learn to ask a lot of questions. Let them explain what they are thinking.
“It’s foolish to answer before you listen.” — Proverbs 18:13
- d. **Use the silent treatment.**
This communicates rejection. If you are too angry to speak with your spouse, talk to _____ about it and then talk to _____.
“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” — Hebrews 4:15-16
- e. **Make sure you are selfish.**
A great marriage is a _____% percent to _____% percent relationship.
“For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” — James 3:16
- f. **Excuse yourself from wrong.**
_____ will always cause tension and disunity in your relationship.
Take responsibility.
“Pride comes before destruction” — Proverbs 16:18
- g. **Never listen.**
Your favorite TV show is not as important as a _____ with your spouse.
“Be quick to listen, slow to speak...” — James 1:19
- h. **Talk down to your mate.**
_____ and insults are sometimes used to get another person to listen, to change, or to respond. This communicates a lack of respect. Bitterness and anger will build in this environment.
“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” — Ephesians 4:29

VI. CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND DEEPER INTIMACY

We must learn how to deal with _____ in our marriage. Unresolved conflicts result in unresolved anger, which results in unexpected and major damage.

Divorce may seem like the only option. **Don’t allow divorce to be an option.** God has a _____ for _____ marriage to be successful, regardless of the damage.

"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel." — Malachi 2:16a

1. Recognize that conflict is not abnormal and that it is actually the doorway to intimacy.
2. Get yourself right first. When you sense conflict in your relationship look first to yourself. Don't repair someone else until you have taken the time to repair yourself. Unless you do this, you will not have the discernment and temperament for healthy conflict resolution.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 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? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." — Matthew 7:1-5

Pursue these four attitudes:

- A) Be willing to be _____. If you are wrong ask for forgiveness!
 - B) Be willing to forgive. Say, "I forgive you." (Matthew 18)
 - C) Be eager to _____.
 - D) Be prayerful.
3. Gather the FACTS about the conflict. Try not to operate in the arena of emotions and guessed intentions. The truth will set you free.
 4. Use the right timing and the right setting for resolving conflict.
 - a. In private
 - b. Not in front of your children
 - c. Columbia University: 90 percent of all arguments occur before a meal.
 - d. Bedtime is a poor time to discuss major problems.
 5. Be solution centered. Avoid accusations and persevere through frustration.
 6. Use conflict as an opportunity to express physical and emotional affection.

Seek _____ from wise and respected friends, or seek marriage counseling from the pastors. Don't let the important conflicts go.

HOMEWORK:

Complete and turn in the following assignments:

- Couple's Project

COUPLE'S PROJECT

Communication/Conflict Resolution Homework

1. Discuss the communication and conflict resolution you saw modeled in your home growing up. What were some of the good and bad patterns you observed?
2. What would you consider or expect to be the most common source of conflict in your marriage? Why?
3. Are you a turtle or a skunk? Do you sense that this reaction is a response to anger?
4. Do you and your fiancé/spouse use any harmful A.R.G.U.M.E.N.T. techniques? How do you think you can improve them?