

LESSON 5

CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE

Before marriage he talks and she listens. During the honeymoon she talks and he listens. In marriage both talk and the neighbors listen. Marriage counselors listen to mates fight for 70 dollars an hour, but neighbors do it for nothing. I have listened to a number of mates fight furiously, and the thing I notice is they have lost their sense of humor about life that enables them to laugh instead of getting mad. If they watched the same thing that is happening to them on TV, they would laugh, but they cannot see how ridiculous it is in their own lives. Divorce is the hash that is made from domestic scraps. It takes a lot of stable thinking and good horse sense to stay married when conflict becomes dominant.

One wife said, "If you really loved me why didn't you marry someone else?" Anger is like fire out of control, and it can do a lot of damage quickly. Women tend to have more resentments in marriage than men do, and it is because they do not, out of fear often, deal with the things that lead to resentment until they are filled with hostility. Marriage tends to give women more reasons to produce resentment.

1. The power structure. Men are more free to make decisions that can be foolish and harmful to the marriage. They have more control, and their job usually takes priority, and so the competition for their time is greater. A wife said, "We have been married 5 years and haven't agreed on anything." He said, "It has been 6 years."
2. She demands greater attention. Just as plants differ a lot in what they need, so mates differ. Some plants need a lot of attention, and water and sun. Others can be neglected and still thrive. Someone said when a woman marries she gives up the attention of several men for the inattention of one. The problem with wedlock is that we forget the combination, and stop doing what each other need.

Erma Bombeck said a survey of husbands showed that 33% said women spent five hours a day putting lint on their husbands socks. 27% said they spent 4 hours a day pouring grease down the drain and watching it harden to give their husbands something to do when they got home. A whopping 58% said women divided their time hiding from the children, watching soap operas, drinking coffee, shrinking shirt collars, discarding one sock from every pair in the drawer, lugging power tools out to the sandbox for the kids to play with.

Conflict in the Bible is common. Prov. 15:1-2, 19:13, 21:9,19, 27:15-16 Solomon adds home conflict to the many follies that rob us of happiness and thus, are not wise. Conflict management is learning how to control the anger and resentment that is inevitable in relationships so that they lead to growth rather than loss. A good fight can clear the air, and open up a relationship so it can travel down a road previously blocked.

* Lets share about how we deal with anger and resentment.

Conflict is normal, but people have different styles of dealing with it.

1. Withdraw-avoid confrontation for I cannot win.
2. Win at all costs, for self-esteem depends on it, for I can never admit I was wrong.
3. Yield-I do not like conflict and so even if I feel I am right I give in.

4. Compromise-Each is willing to give and take so that both are sometimes winners.
5. Resolve-we work it out and come up with an answer so that both win.

Resolving conflict is the key to growth for it involves confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. Conflict is often the symptom of unmet needs. The wife yells at her husband for leaving his socks on the bathroom floor, but her real anger is due to his not taking the storm windows off three weeks after she asked him to. You have to probe to find the real issue and resolve it. We often see our mate as a problem maker because we do not see what it is in us that causes her or him to be a problem.

The battle for balance is what life and marriage is all about. E.S. Jones writes, "Self-surrender is written into the very basis of life. The male cell has 46 chromosomes in it. The female the same. To unite in forming a new life, each has to reduce the 46 to 23, so that the new life will have 46. self-surrender is at the basis of life in its inception and in its continuance. There are three basic urges in human nature-self, sex, and the herd. The self is obviously self-regarding; the herd urge is obviously others-regarding; and the sex urge is partly self-regarding and partly others-regarding. So there are just 2 basic driving urges in human nature-the self-regarding and the others-regarding. If you build your life on the self-urge-the herd urge is unfulfilled. Both of these urges must be fulfilled simultaneously. To love your neighbor (the herd urge) as you love yourself (The self urge) is good sense; to do anything else is foolish."

*Describe the most common conflict you have as mates.

Lavonne and I had most of our conflict in early marriage over where we would go for holidays-to her folks or to mine. The budget was the other area of conflict. We had so little, and it seemed like the grocery bill was always too much. Lavonne would get frustrated with the time I put into my work and she would get depressed, and we finally have a conflict. I promise to do better, and then after awhile we start all over again.

REASONS FOR CONFLICT

1. Assumptions of what a mate should do and be like.
2. Misunderstandings.
3. Unrealistic expectations.
4. Limitations of time.

RULES FOR A GOOD FIGHT based on Eph. 4:25-32

1. Keep it honest v.25
2. Keep it under control v.26
3. Keep it timed right v. 26-7
4. Keep it positive v.28
5. Keep it tactful v.29
6. Keep it private v. 31
7. Keep it cleared up v. 32

Conflict in marriage is no sign of a lack of love or poor adjustment. Troubles are part of married life just as sickness is a part of any good life. Troubles are built into life in general. Job 5:7 and I Cor. 7:28 for marriage in particular. Paul says those who marry will have worldly troubles. The point is, there is a cost involved for the good things of marriage.

DEPRESSION

In varying degrees of severity almost all couples have their share of depression. This arises because of disillusionment. No two people live happily ever after, and even realistic people can feel depressed about the fact that life is not ideal. Couples cannot always feel the thrill of oneness. Circumstance beyond their control will spoil some of their dreams and plans. Pressures from family and others can be expected to lead to frustration. Depression comes often because of unrealistic expectations we put on ourselves and our mate. No mate can meet all of our needs.

One woman said, "When I got married I was looking for an ideal. Then it became an ordeal, and now I want a new deal." Quite often one mate will be happy with the marriage and the other not, and the reason is one is getting their needs met and the other is not. It is a mystery to the happy one why the other is not happy. Oneness does not mean if one is happy the other will be. There is a lack of balance in such a marriage, and the only solution is for the happy one to listen to and respond to the unhappy one, and give them what is needed to meet their need.

BEING HONEST WITH FEELINGS

Feelings are—they just are. They are not good or bad—they just are. If I feel hurt that you did not send me a card for my birthday, that is how I really feel. Now, it may be foolish to feel so, but telling me it is foolish will not change the fact. Labeling emotions does not make them go away.

We tend to treat feelings like things. If I pick up a dirty rotten banana peeling, you can say in disgust, "Drop that thing," and I can do it, and it's out of my life. We can say to a child who grabs something dangerous, "That will hurt," and the hand is withdrawn. With feelings the same action does not work. Feelings are not things. If it's dirty or dangerous you can't just label it and drop it, and be done with it. It has to be dealt with.

Feelings have to be felt, faced up to, and figured out, and then by understanding be allowed to fade and be forgotten. In other words, there is a process, and to stop the process, and force the feelings to be suppressed, and not dealt with, will lead that feeling to not fade, but feed on your inner man, and produce results you do not always have control of. We need to keep feelings out in the open, and under the control of our conscious mind. To allow them to get into your subconscious, and work away like termites unseen and unsuspected is to lose control of who you are.

Self esteem is the ability to deal with feelings without being ashamed because the feelings are not always positive. The Christian who knows he has anger, resentment, lust, and envy will be in far better control of these things than the Christian who suppresses them, and refuses to believe he is contaminated by such garbage. The healthiest Christian is the Christian who knows just how much evil still lurks in his heart.

It is possible to come to hate someone you once loved because you do not deal with your emotions. Dr. Henry Brandt writes, "I have talked with thousands of couples, young and old alike, whose hopes for a happy marriage have been dashed. We discuss the same questions:

How is it possible--to feel so harshly toward someone you once felt such tenderness for?

How is it possible--to be repulsed at the idea of being touched by a person whom you once so desired?

How is it possible--to have such sharp, unsolved conflicts when you once got along so well?"

WHAT HURTS MARRIAGE?

For Adam and Eve it was a mere apple that hurt their relationship. The first sin is almost trivial and illustrates that many of life's problems are not caused by big things and crisis, but trivialities that we allow to turn into tremendous torments until they tear us apart. Listen to Dr. Henry Brandt in I Want My Marriage To Be Better page 32-38.

Let's look at trivialities.

1. What do you do with the newspaper? Do you fold it or scatter it all over?
2. Do you change clothes when you come home or stay grubby all evening?
3. Do you set the air-conditioner high when others are cold?
4. How many blankets do you need?
5. What do you do with wet towels?
6. Where do you squeeze the toothpaste?
7. Do you mix the different foods together on your plate?
8. Do you serve mustard or catsup in bottles or little dishes?
9. Do you cut your meat all at once or a bite at a time?
10. Do you dress for breakfast or are you in your bathrobe?

* Share some of the trivial things you do your mate does not like.

ANGER Eph. 4:26, Prov. 15:1.

Sally Conway said, "Anger often comes from frustrated expectations. We need to be less rigid of what we demand of others and ourselves, and we will avoid some of the occasions for anger. Anger also comes from an unforgiving spirit. I see that a lot of my anger is because I expect people to be perfect. When they are not, I hold it against them. Imagine being angry because another person is human."

Wives of men in mid-life crisis often get angry for he just sits around, and is not motivated to fix things. He is depressed and she is mad that he is behaving like this. Is she to simply be submissive? Denice Gibson, a psychologist and marriage counselor writes, "A doormat wife does not show respect for her husband. Her Godly duty is to call forth Christlike actions and attitudes on his part. The wife who suffers silently disobeys God. She does not give her husband an opportunity to be Christ to her. She does not clearly alert him to her needs."

In other words, anger can be a legitimate means of communication. David Augsburg, in Caring Enough To Confront writes, "Conflict is natural, normal, neutral, and sometimes even delightful. It can turn into painful or disastrous ends, but it doesn't need to. Conflict is neither good nor bad, right or wrong. Conflict simply is. How we view, approach, and work through our differences does, to a large extent, determine our whole life pattern."

Assertion is good, but aggression is bad. Assertion is based on good self-esteem that says I matter, and my views are of value, and I have a right to be heard and so one asserts that right and gets heard. Aggression is the desire to blame and dominate and manipulate the other to get even, or just to release steam. It is an abusive use of the other, and communicates only that you are

angry. Much conflict can be eliminated just by learning to laugh at the mistakes we all make in life. Laughter can dissolve so many of the trivialities of life.

RESOLVING CONFLICT

1. Take responsibility for your own actions and do not blame others.
2. Make it clear you understand what the conflict is all about. Listen to your mate to get the full picture of the problem.
3. Make it clear you are willing to forgive.
4. Do not assume your mate has created a problem intentionally.
5. Learn to postpone conflict to the best time, and not when hungry or angry.
6. Identify your contribution to the conflict even if you think your mate is the main problem. It is always a we have a problem and not you do.
7. Identify alternative solutions. Brainstorm to think of all possible ways.
8. Implement new behavior.

A magnifying glass held over straw will eventually cause a fire to burst forth, and often one mate will not start a fight but will provide the atmosphere which causes the other mate to ignite and explode. That one can seem so innocent, but is equally guilty.

A bad fight is one where there is hurt but not healing. Nothing gets resolved and the air is not cleaned. Nagging is defined as, "The art of reminding someone to do something when you know he hasn't forgotten."

COMMUNICATION IN PROVERBS

1. Power of words 11:12-18, 15:4, 18:8, 21, 25:11, 26:22
2. Listen 15:31, 18:13,15, 19:20, 21:28
3. Think before you speak 12:18, 14:29, 15:28, 16:32, 21:23, 26:4, 29:20
4. Timing 15:23, 25:11
5. Don't talk too much 10:19, 11:12-13, 13:3, 17:27-8, 18:2, 20:19, 21:23
6. Avoid nagging 17:9, 21:9
7. Use calm and soft answers 15:1,4 16:1, 25:15
8. Avoid quarrels 17:14, 20:3, 26:21