

LESSON 6

Marriage is a living thing and all living things suffer to some degree, and so some suffering is inevitable in any marriage. Love is the source of much suffering. If you do not love a cat or dog it does not hurt you to see it dead along the road. If you do not know the people whom you read about who die in floods and plane crashes you do not suffer grief. Our suffering is only as great and as wide as our sphere of love.

Marriage is the uniting of two people in the strongest of love relationships, and, therefore, it carries with it the greatest potential for suffering. A stranger can criticize you and it will not hurt, but a mate's critical tongue can sting like blazes. Sticks and stones may break my bones but names can never hurt me is a great slogan for children to sling back at the neighborhood brats, but it won't hold water in marriage. Your mate can hurt you worse with words than with sticks and stones. Charles Tschep said, "Those who have never hurt each other have never loved each other." The way to avoid suffering is to avoid love, but the result is loss of life. Your pet rock won't hurt you, but whatever has life will hurt you, and the more so the more you love.

Jeremias Gotthelf wrote, "When the bleak days come, when flaws appear in one of the other of you, do not think of your ill luck, of your unhappiness. Think of God rather, who has longed since known all these flaws and who have brought you together precisely because of them, so that you may help each other to correct your flaws. This is the purpose and the task of your coming together."

The French author Alin wrote, "Up to now I have been trying to find a person who would please me. From now on, I will try to please the person I have found."

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMANCE EMPIRE

1. Not listening.

Wife: "Dear, the plumber didn't come to fix the leak behind the water heater today."

Husband: "Uh-uhm."

Wife: "The Pipe burst today and flooded the basement."

Husband: "Quiet, its third down and goal to go."

Wife: "Some of the wiring got wet and almost electrocuted fluffy."

Husband: "Oh no--Touchdown."

Wife: "The vet says that he will be better in a week."

Husband: "Can you get me something to drink."

Wife: "The plumber finally came and said that he was happy our pipe broke because now she can afford to go on a vacation."

Husband: "Arn't you listening? I said I need something to drink."

Wife: "And Stanley, I'm leaving you. The plumber and I are flying to Acapulco in the morning."

Husband: "Can't you stop all that yaking and get me a drink. The trouble around here is that nobody ever listens to me."

Any close relationship will have some conflict. There may not be any serious fights, but their will be at least friendly fussing which can still lead to resentment. Sometimes a good quarrel can clear the air, and if a couple

never fight they may be suppressing many aggravations. Wallace Denton writes, "As a marriage counselor, I am in full agreement with those who say that we would have fewer divorces in the U. S. if we had more good quarrels!" If people do not communicate their hostility they will burn inside, and this is damaging to the relationship. You can be angry with someone and love them dearly as we do with our children. Unexpressed anger can lead to all sorts of physical as well as psychological problems.

A good fight gets issues out in the open, and both partners get a chance to air their perspective, and so there is a chance for some compromise to meet each others need. A fair fight limits the issues to what caused the anger, and does not go all through history dragging up old issues. It is hitting below the belt to bring up old issues that do not relate to the present frustration. To be fighting over how to discipline the kids, and then to throw up the issue of weight is dirty fighting, for it is not relevant to the issue at hand. Dirty fighting has as its aim to hurt the other. Good fighting has as its aim the goal of resolving a problem to the satisfaction of both.

"If it weren't for marriage, husbands and wives would have to fight with strangers."

David Mace said, "The fundamental cause of marital failure in our time is the inability to resolve the anger which is inevitably generated in an intimate relationship." To suppress it and not deal with it can lead to far greater sin than to get it out in the open where it can be discussed and resolved. Buried resentments block intimacy. Rollo May says that couples that scream at each other in therapy and get out all of their anger come to feel loving after it is over. They get the blockage out of the way so their love can flow again. Negative feelings need to be dealt with for the positive to flow.

Many marriages are like that of Edward who brought home a guest and thought it was a good move for business. His wife scoffed at the plan and he felt hurt and angry. He did not say anything, but just did things to hurt his wife in return. This led to the breakdown of their marriage. All he had to do was to let his wife know of his anger, and get it out, and deal with it, and he could have stopped the need for revenge that led to all of the negatives. People ruin their marriages often because of unresolved anger that does not get resolved because they never talk about it. They just let it burn and cause them to act stupid.

The most happily married wives are those who say that both they and their husbands tell each other when they are displeased, and they try to work out a compromise. If people deal openly with the negatives they keep them under control. Someone has put together this outline for conflict management.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

A. BASIC GROUND RULES:

1. Complain with the spirit of good will.
2. Avoid attacking each other. Forget insults and criticism of relatives.
3. Focus on the here and now. Forget old issues of conflict.
4. Admit your feelings. Be honest about what is wrong.

B. SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES:

1. Select an appropriate time. Bad timing makes conflict worse.
2. Be specific.
3. Deal with one issue at a time.

4. Ask for a reasonable change.
 5. Listen carefully.
 6. Try to except and understand differences.
- C. FINDING A SOLUTION:
1. Think, explore, meditate.
 2. Be willing to accept incomplete resolution. Don't be a all or nothing person.
 3. Consider compromise.
 4. Avoid trying to win. In a good conflict both win.

His wife called him a model husband, and he was proud until he looked up model and found that it meant, "A small imitation of the real thing." A wife in anger said, "I think you only married me because my daddy left me a lot of money." The husband said, "That's not true. I didn't care who left you the money."

My dad use to say to mom when she was in a nagging mood, "If I was as good as you want me to be I wouldn't have anything to do with you."

YOU ARE NOT THE TARGET.

Often you just happen to be in the line of fire and the anger is taken out on you. Do not fight a war that is never declared. Recognize you are a target substitute. Identify the real target, and refuse to take it personally responding with your own fire. People often get angry at God when he is not the author of what makes them angry. It is jumping to false conclusions when you assume you are the target of his judgment. Negative emotions are contagious and can spread from one to another.

Energy is neutral. It is what you do with it that makes it harmful or helpful. The energy generated by conflict can be let loose to do damage, or it can be controlled so as to build a relationship. Sublimation is taking energy that tends to push you into sub-loving behavior and transform it into loving behavior. Some wives do their best house cleaning when they are angry--that is sublimation.

* Can you think of good things you do when you are angry? I have noticed that if I am not up to par it does me a world of good to meet someone else's need. This can be a part of what it means when Jesus said it is more blessed to give then to receive. The giver lifts two lives.

HOMEWORK:

John Dresher has some issues for couples to talk over. Share them this week.

1. Three things which attracted me to you were...
2. Our love is different than in courtship. Now it is...
3. The time when I feel closest to you is...
4. The greatest hindrance to our happiness is I feel, is...
5. Sometimes I wish you would...
6. I wish we together could...
7. The happy time together when I remember most is...
8. In money matters we...
9. I would like to...

May God bless you as you reflect on the issues we have dealt with over the last six weeks, and keep in mind that we tend to forget what we know, and so we need

to be constantly refreshing our awareness of what we know in order to keep romance alive in our marriages.