

SUCCESSFUL QUARRELING

Introduction

- A. Conflict is **inevitable**. "A fellow who says he has never had an argument with his wife is apt to lie about other things, too."
- B. A partnership requires working on things together. You will have disagreements due to your different backgrounds and opinions.
 - 1. Marriage is two *becoming* one and the whole time you are trying to determine which one it is!
 - 2. One fellow said, "The nice thing about being single is that all the decisions are unanimous."
- C. Long-term marital stability demands **the ability to resolve conflict successfully!**
 - 1. The positives first draw people together, but the negatives (and how they are handled) ultimately pull people apart.
 - 2. The 4 emotional land mines: **CRITICISM, CONTEMPT, DEFENSIVENESS, and WITHDRAWAL** (esp. if they become chronic and ignored)
 - 3. **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**: critically important, yet too often neglected.

I. GENERAL POINTERS

- A. Be *careful*...One zinger erases twenty positives!
 - 1. Song: "Angry words, oh, let them never..." is good advice.
 - 2. Hurtful, harsh comments can become huge withdrawals from the love bank and do serious damage.
- B. When in doubt, *wait!*
 - 1. Once it is out, the hurt is not so easily taken back.
 - 2. One secret to a happy marriage: Let three things go every day **unsaid!**
- C. Relationships have *momentum*, an ebb and flow that is either positive or negative.
 - 1. Like a snowball rolling down hill, it can be either an advantage or disadvantage.
 - 2. When heading in the wrong direction, stand up and say, "Let's get off this negative cycle and stop hurting each other. Let's apologize, put it behind us, and build each other up, not tear each other down!"
- D. Beware of the modern *egalitarian marriage*.
 - 1. Traditional roles have been discarded today. There is **no final arbitrator of disputes**.
 - 2. No other organization on earth functions this way. Marriages that attempt to deteriorate into power plays.

3. Blurred **roles** and **rules** put untold strain on American marriages.

II. WHAT DO MOST COUPLES ARGUE ABOUT?

A. 5 traditional areas of conflict since studies began:

1. Sex
2. Children (whether/when to have and how to raise)
3. Money
4. In-laws (“Who’s more important, your parents or me?”)
5. Tremendous Trifles -- inconsequential things that drive people to the brink of mayhem, screaming meemies, or divorce!
 - a. Trifles are something small, yet may cause tremendous conflict.
 - b. They are usually things one never thought about before marriage.
 - c. Examples: Dog-earring pages of a book, leaving hairs in the sink, squeezing the toothpaste “wrong”, eating styles, sleeping habits, etc.
 1. On his 25th wedding anniversary, one man calculated he had kicked the sheets loose about 7,500 times, taking him at least a minute each night.
 2. Therefore, he claimed to have wasted 125 hours of his life since he had gotten married fighting with his wife over the sheets!
 - d. If the relationship is troubled already, these can become the focus. But if it’s solid, they are not destructive, just irritating.

B. New top issues!

1. Who does the domestic chores? (Women are often resentful if they must work full-time, then pull a double-shift at home, too.)
2. How do we spend our precious and limited leisure time?

III. HAPPY vs. UNHAPPY COUPLES

A. Ironically, both argue about the *same things*. The difference is not in how many arguments or how often, but in *how* the parties argue.

1. Happy couples argue as if the issue is **external** to the relationship.
2. Unhappy couples **get personal** and “hit below the belt” attacking the *person* rather than the *problem*.
 - a. Applying the “Seven Rules for Fighting Fairly” is important.
 - b. Following them will prevent harming the relationship as disagreements are worked out.

B. Mudd and Hay, two social scientists, found that even after a conflict or tremendous trifle was fixed, it did not solve the problem..

1. The real problem was the *relationship itself*. Other surface issues were just symptoms.
2. **Serious relationship problems** were revealed.
 - a. Feeling lonely and unloved

- b. Feeling misunderstood
 - c. Losing perspective
 - d. Feeling rejected and unworthy
3. Time was wasted focusing on peripheral issues instead of on the *relationship*.
- C. Happy couples are very careful to not even think, much less express, the **fatal thought**: "This means **you don't love me** anymore, so maybe we ought to **divorce**."

IV. WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS DURING CONFLICT?

A. **THREE STAGES of MARITAL INTIMACY** (Willard Harley: His Needs, Her Needs)

1. **Stage one**: You become INTIMATE and feel close, so you tell each other *everything*.
2. **Stage two**: You begin to have disagreements which is not bad as long as you can *resolve the conflict and restore intimacy*. Couples go from stage one to stage two all the time. The key: always return to stage one. (Paul admonishes, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Eph 4:26)
3. **Stage three**: You remain in conflict and cannot resolve it. You soon feel frustrated and misunderstood, so begin to hurt each other and the relationship. Emotional turmoil becomes the norm. Eventually one or both give up, erect deadly walls of defense, and enter into **withdrawal**.

B. **The withdrawal decision...is a very serious one.** It means you have given up. You *emotionally disconnect* yourself in order to cope.

1. You become emotionally and spiritually divorced from each other. You wake up one day and decide you "do not love him/her anymore." The woman especially dreads physical contact because she cannot give of herself in this state.
2. The wall now keeps out the good and bad. Even thoughtful, positive things are meaningless and no longer "deposits in your love bank" until you feel SAFE enough to let the wall down.
3. **Warning: WHEN THE OPEN SHARING OF FEELINGS STOPS, PASSION DIES!**
4. When you have romantic love, you think you can never lose it; and when you lose it, you think you can never get it back. Both are untrue.
 - a. Romantic love *can be regained* if the parties understand what has happened. **Learning how to resolve conflict** will let both of you feel **SAFE** enough to share feelings so the walls can come down.
 - b. Trust is re-established. Over time, the old feelings of **intimacy and romance return!!**

- c. Affairs happen when walls (secrets) are created between spouses and windows of intimacy with someone else.
- d. Commit to full disclosure: If there is **nothing important your spouse doesn't know**, an affair will almost never happen.

Conclusion:

- A. Stay in stage one (intimacy) and learn how to avoid stage three (withdrawal). You will remain happily married!
- B. To avoid “the wall”, learn to resolve conflict constructively. Have the courage to face tough topics to begin with. If a wall is already up, bravely go back and work through the conflict to regain intimacy.
- C. To feel safe, use the guidelines found in “7 Rules for Fighting Fairly.”
- D. This can prevent a wall from forming and build a strong marriage if practiced from the start. But if one is long-established and bitterness has crept in, then a good counselor is necessary to help you work through it!
- E. It is painful and a bit scary, but **well worth it**. After coming through a crisis, couples are often better off and closer than ever before! (Like a broken bone that heals even stronger!)
- F. When folks tell you it's no use for their love is “dead,” give them HOPE. Remind them that we serve a God who specializes in the *resurrection from the dead!*