Articles

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13: MODEL FOR MARITAL HARMONY

Couples come in for counseling because there is strife in their marriage. Often there is lack of emotional intimacy and that coolness is exacerbated by fighting and emotional distancing. The wills get set against each other and instead of treating the partner as a friend, they start to treat each other as an enemy. Wouldn't it be nice to have a process to break out of this dance? The following model is a methodology that has worked for some couples. What is needed to make it work is an honest desire to participate in the following tasks.

Process for Restoring Harmony

Stage 1 is writing down *"feelings"* - The first task is to ask God to help you jointly agree on what the issue is that needs resolving. Each person writes down the jointly agreed issue at the top of his/her paper. Then, each person finds a quiet place and takes 10 minutes to write down all his/her feelings related to the issue. Each sentence starts with "I feel…". When finished writing, each person has a list of how (s)he feels about the issue at hand.

Stage 2 involves *"reading"* - The partners exchange the papers and then quietly sit and read about the other person's feelings. At the end of stage two, each individual will have an understanding of not only his/her own feelings, but the feelings of the partner as well.

Stage 3 involves *"restating"* the other person's feelings - Each partner takes a turn at expressing what he or she understands the partner's feelings to be, with no adding, editing or judging.

Stage 4 involves *"confession"* - In prayer, each partner comes before God and sincerely confesses the sin that is in his/her life, which is contributing to this conflict. You can do this separately or together, whichever works best. This step is crucial. Each person needs to lay down before God and repent from whatever is against God's will. Examples would be confessing pride, anger, unforgiveness, desire for revenge, desire to hurt, judgment, lack of mercy, mockery, teasing, a critical spirit, a spirit of rebellion, a desire to control and any other sins that the Holy Spirit reveals to the person.

Stage 5 involves *"forgiveness"* - when you have finished confessing to God with a broken and contrite heart, begin a prayer of forgiveness for your partner. Mentally lay before you a large white sheet, and then go inside yourself and get everything that you are holding against your partner and put it on the sheet. You do this by praying,

"Dear Lord, I choose to forgive "partner's name" for ……………………………………… and I place it on the sheet.

When you have pulled everything out and placed it on the sheet, including all the related

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pain and hurt, use your imagination to bundle all of it into a big ball and then ask Jesus to come and remove the bundle.

Stage 6 involves "commitment" - with the resentment and anger gone, now commit your mind to loving your partner in a way that exhibits the love of Christ. Ask Jesus to empower you to love your partner, accept your partner and care for your partner in a sacrificial way. With this attitude of love, then engage in a discussion to solve the problem together in a way that meets the needs of both parties.

Stage 7 involves "problem solving" - starting with the word "how", begin a positive problem solving session. "How can we ……………. ". Eliminate the word why from the conversation. Respect each other's opinion and validate each other's needs. Spend whatever time it takes to get a consensus where you both agree on the solution. Remember, a marriage is a partnership of equals.

Stage 8 involves "committing to action" - when a plan has been agreed upon, commit to making it happen as agreed. When the changes occur, praise each other and give thanks to God for the results.

Conclusion: this process has the potential of breaking through long existing strongholds, but it will only work if each partner is sincere and honest and willing to work with God to make it happen.

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