

## Getting marriage right - How to Fight Right

### Ephesians 4:25-27. 29-32

Last week we started a series on Marriage and how to get it 'right'. I use the term 'right' in a Tui's sort of way "Yeah Right" because we will never get it right – perfect – but I believe if we work at it, we can at least get our marriages moving in the "right" direction.

Last week we looked at making the right choice as far a marriage partner goes and while there is a fair bit of wisdom we can tap into as we make this life changing decision, but as I said last week, the secret of a happy marriage is not making the right choice, but being the right person.

One of the key to being the right person and therefore having a great marriage is striving for good communication and dealing with conflict appropriately. And a key part of dealing with conflict appropriately is listening and understanding each other.

Can I start the service by helping you to understand us blokes. No not all of us are the same but there are some consistent characteristics.

1. Many men enjoy watching sport on TV. Let it be. It's a force of nature, like the changing of the tides. You can't stop it.
2. Shopping is NOT a sport. And no, we are never going to think of it that way.
3. Whenever possible, please say whatever you have to say during commercials.
4. If we ask what is wrong and you say "nothing," we will act like nothing's wrong. We know you are lying, but it is just not worth the hassle.
5. We are not mind readers and we never will be. Our lack of mind-reading ability is not proof of how little we care about you.
6. Just tell me what you want. Subtle hints do not work! Strong hints do not work! Obvious hints do not work! Just ask!
7. Come to us with a problem only if you want help solving it. That's what we do. Sympathy is what your friends are for.
8. If something we said can be interpreted two ways, and one of the ways makes you sad or angry, we meant the other one.
9. Anything we said 6 months ago is inadmissible in an argument. In fact, all comments become null and void after 7 days.
10. If it itches, it will be scratched. We do that.

Let's get someone up here who can speak with a bit more authority about relationships and dealing with conflict than me - Lyn Stanley - come and help me.

- Lyn, first of all tell us a bit about yourself, are you married, children?
- You spend a fair bit of your time talking to people about marriage, fill us in on what you do?
- Lyn, I am sure you have discovered in your work that there is one thing that is a key contributor to 100% of divorces – and that is marriage.
- Can you share some stuff that you have discovered along the way as you have worked with people and helped them in their relationships?

Lyn to share

Can I conclude by reading a passage that was written to a church in Ephesus, which has a lot to say about relationships, not just marriage.

Paul has been talking about living as Christian, putting off the old ways of living, the old habits and being renewed in thought and attitude. And so Paul goes on in verse 25...

Ephesians 4:25-27, 29-32

*<sup>25</sup> What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretence. Tell each other the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.*

*<sup>26-27</sup> Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life....*

*...<sup>29</sup> Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.*

*<sup>30</sup> Don't grieve God. Don't break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don't take such a gift for granted.*

*<sup>31-32</sup> Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.*

**(1) Be honest.**

As Paul says in our text for this morning,

*"<sup>25</sup> What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretence. Tell each other the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself."*

Statistics tell us that 70% of spouses lie to each other. Their dishonesty includes stretching the facts, not telling the whole story, staying silent when we should speak, whitewashing motives, twisting the truth by adding false details, contriving stories and so on. Not sure where I got that statistic from but I think it is "stretching the facts, not telling the whole story, and twisting the truth".

Whether it is 70% or 100%, the more couples practice these kinds of deceit, the weaker their relationship becomes.

As Jesus said, the truth sets us free, so no marriage is more in bondage than a marriage that's wrapped in falsehood, deception, and lies. Paul says, "Put that kind of behaviour aside". When conflict comes, be honest with each other.

## **(2) The second tip for conflict resolution: Be angry.**

Yes, that's right! Be angry! God's Word actually gives us permission to feel this emotion. Verse 26 says, *Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry.*

We're ordered to be angry. You see, not all anger is sinful. Not all anger is bad.

- For example, we should be mad when we see the innocent cheated or someone being mistreated.
- We should tremble with rage when we see or hear of a child being beaten and abused.
- And to simply shrug off a serious offense by your closest, most trusted companion - your spouse - is a sure sign that the two of you are disconnected.

If you can't be honest enough to say, "I'm mad, I'm upset, I'm angry" to your husband or wife, then you are a long way from experiencing marital oneness.

And then it says, *"but when you're mad, remember, don't sin."* You see, our problem is not anger - it's the way we tend to respond to it. Most of the time we express anger in immature, selfish, hurtful ways.

- For example, some people are what you might call, "**bottlers.**" They bury their anger deep inside. The problem with burying anger like this is that, like toxic waste that is buried in the ground, buried anger will eventually

leak out poisoning relationships - or even lead the angry person himself into the pits of depression.

- Others deal with their anger in the opposite way. Instead of "bottlers," they are "**spewers.**" They just let it fly. They say whatever comes to mind, no matter how much pain it causes, like a volcano that blows its top spreading molten lava everywhere, vaporizing everything in its path.

Obviously, the best way to handle anger is to not bottle it or spew it but to express it appropriately.

So, be angry - but don't sin – cool off and let your love prompt you to listen to each other.

### **(3) Be prayerful.**

While you're cooling off, get on your knees and pray about the problem because it is amazing how many seemingly insurmountable conflicts get whittled down to a manageable size in the midst of prayer and contemplation. While our human tendency is to cast blame on others and to deny personal guilt, Jesus challenged us to look at ourselves before we point our finger at others. Do you remember His words? *"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own?"* (Matthew 7:3)

Hybels writes,

*"Tension in most marriages could be cut in half if spouses would pray every day about their marriages. God does miracles when people pray. Lives are changed and hearts are softened when people pray. Pointing fingers change direction when people pray. Problems shrink when people pray. Sometimes, conflicts even disappear when people pray."*

### **(4) be kind.**

Look at verse 29 where it says, <sup>29</sup> *Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.*

Verse 32 adds to this, saying, *Be gentle with one another, sensitive.*

Be nice to each other! I don't that needs explaining, just be nice!

### **(5) and finally, be forgiving.**

As Paul says in verse 32, "Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you."

When couples find themselves embroiled in a fight we must remember that the goal is not to see who wins - but to be reconciled. We're not trying to win arguments; we're trying to win hearts! So married couples, friends and family, church communities must be committed to resolving the issue and restoring harmony.

And, remember, forgiveness is not a feeling. It is an act of the will. And forgiveness is not easy and it often takes time. It goes against our nature. Love takes a lot of work!