



Built To Last – Marriage Through Early Parenthood

CONTINUED FROM MARCH ARTICLE

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Last month we explored the keys to a strong, lasting relationship and left off discussing communication in your marriage. I was saying that communication takes techniques. Whether you know it or not, you are using communication techniques all the time. The question is, are your techniques working?

Before we head down the avenue of communications, I wanted to delve into some of the answers to the question of “What was your relationship built upon?” This is an important thing to look at but don’t dismay, if your relationship wasn’t built on a solid foundation, it does not mean you are doomed. Awareness, commitment, love, and communication can do wonders. With that said, lets look into the answer to that question.

Friendship rose to the top as the core to what strong, lasting relationships were built upon; a mutual enjoyment of just being together! Keep everything in moderation though. Some marriages that were built on friendship soon turn into platonic marriages. This is fine if this works for both of you, though most of us need a bit of passion mixed in now and then. On the other hand if the relationship is purely based on passion and lust, what happens when the flame burns out?

As one person put it, “People often mistakenly identify the feelings of passion for that of the feeling of love. But love is much deeper than that. Passion is a quick burning flame. Love is like a tree that grows deep roots and reaches high up to the sky. I jokingly say that love is not flowers and romance, love means washing your husband’s laundry and folding his underwear! It isn’t about jewelry, dinners with candles or vacations to exotic places – though those things are nice and necessary every now and then. It is about taking turns staying up all night with a sick child. It is about doing something that makes the other person happy just because it makes them happy, not because it is a special day such as Valentine’s Day or an anniversary.”

In addition to friendship, love, and passion, many people responded that they were in a healthy emotional state, pretty confident about themselves and thus attracted another

healthy individual into their lives. From this place they were able to be themselves; open, free to be honest, even silly and scared. They walked through the unknown together hand in hand as kindred spirits. This sense of self allowed for friendship, passion, and love to be present.

Having things in common is another factor to those marriages that are built to last. Though one needs their own interests, it is important that the couple comes from a similar philosophy and shares common interests. Many individuals cited their common faith as being a bedrock to their marriage while also sharing the same love of the outdoors, or art, traveling, or the desire to have children and raise a family together.

What I have found is when people get married for the wrong reasons, they tend to struggle later in their marriage. They may have gotten married because they liked feeling needed; they didn't know how to get out of a dead-end relationship; they wanted to impress (or anger) their parents/siblings/friends; they were feeling external pressure from their parents/siblings/friends/society; they wanted financial security or a certain status; they were pregnant; it's what they thought was expected of them; they reached a certain age and felt they "should" be married by now; they wanted to have children; they felt they owed it to their partner; and so forth. If you find that this describes you in anyway and you are struggling in your marriage, it may be time to admit it to yourself and your spouse so you can begin anew. If you try to ignore the truth, the natural pressures of early parenthood are bound to burst it open in a not so productive way. Again, with love, commitment and effective communications, you can re-build the foundation. Just like a house, it may take time, cracks may appear in the walls along the way, and ceilings may fall, but houses have been re-built and reinforced, and so can your marriage.

Moving onto communications as promised last month, assuming the love and commitment is there, what are some of the techniques that people use to communicate some of those more difficult issues with their spouse? Deep respect for one another came out on top. From that place *what* is said and *how* it is said falls into place.

Remaining open to hear the other person's point of view and then sharing yours can sometimes be a difficult thing to do when you are coming from your 'position' or enveloped in your complaint. Moving from your position or complaint and approaching the issue from your intention or desire is the key. In other words, If my husband and I are arguing about how much time we are NOT getting for ourselves it's easy to argue from our positions, "You got time Friday night to play in your band, when was the last time I ever had time for myself?" He might retort, "You get time when you go and play with your friends during the day." I bark back "That's not ME time, I'm mothering during that time." See how it can go? But what's the real issue here? Neither of us are feeling like we are filling our own vessel with time for ourselves and we may be feeling unappreciated. What happens then is a struggle for a limited resource.

Turning the focus around and coming from intention (or desire) versus position would sound something like, "I think it's important that we each get some time for ourselves. What is it that you enjoy doing? What would you like to do for yourself this week? How

can I help you get that? What do you need from me?" Followed by a conversation about what I would like and how we can make that happen.

This is a technique that takes practice. I've been teaching it for years and every now and then while I'm ranting and raving my Husband will interrupt and ask, "What is it that you want?" So before you go into the tirade, bring your attention into your body and notice where you are feeling the stress. Pay close attention to the physical sensations and emotions that are there and ask yourself, "What do I need?" or "What is my body trying to tell me?" From there, formulate your request. Requests made responsibly and with a level head and attuned heart are much better received than the flailing complaints about what's not right or accusations against your partner.

Know your buttons. What are the things you and your spouse tend to argue over? It's important to take ownership of how you may have created the conflict, what other perspectives on the issue might be, and what you can do to rectify it. Then take action toward getting to the other side. One husband quotes the line from the Lion King when the monkey hits Simba over the head with his staff, twice. The first time Simba says, "ouch, what did you do that for?", and the monkey says "doesn't matter, it's in the past." The second time the monkey swings at Simba, Simba ducks down to miss the blow. How often do you just stand there and engage in the same argument over and over instead of taking different actions or seeing it from a different perspective?

Honoring the other person's styles and accepting them can be a very effective tool as well. As a few women expressed, "I think it's important to learn how best to communicate with your partner. Joey prefers to hear the ending to a story first, and then for me to fill him in on the details - but only if he is interested enough to ask for them. This is in sharp contrast to the majority of my girl friends who don't want me to skip a single nitty gritty detail in the telling of a good story. But by knowing this about Joey, I am able to communicate the important part of my story before he loses interest. Although this is not how I would PREFER to tell a story, it is by far the most effective way for me to communicate with him. It is also important for me to let him know upfront if I would like his advice on what I am about to tell him, his opinion, or if I would just like him to listen. For Joey this is important to know upfront as it is his nature to want to "fix" my problems and generate solutions."

When all else fails in communication, turn to the tried and true, "What I'm hearing you say is..." paraphrasing back what you heard and asking "is that right? Is there more?" Stay present in listening mode until the other person is truly empty. If you do this honestly, it makes it hard to be defensive and you can get to the root of the problem quite quickly. Just being heard is often all that's needed. You can even try this technique sitting or standing side by side instead of across from one another. This physical position can disarm you and take the combat out of the situation. Really listen to your partner even when you're dying to interrupt them with an explanation, excuse, or "yeah, but...." It's important to truly listen rather than silently formulating your comeback while you are appearing to listen.

Finally, if you believe in God, you can bring the whole mess before God in a kind of prayerful conversation, and insights may spring from that. If you would rather, allow yourself to float above the situation and peer down upon it. This often gives new and valuable perspectives.

Happy conversing and basking in your marriage – all the good, the bad, and the ugly.
Cheers to you!

Stay tuned for more on this topic next month – What has changed since having kids and What do you do to keep the love alive?

Reminder - Group Coaching Registrations are being accepted now for April-June Groups. Call Gretchen for more information at (303) 642-3105.