

Speaking the Truth in Love

When individuals or couples come for counseling regarding their marriage they often report having communication difficulties. Couples frequently have things in their lives that they believe they need to talk about but can't. The item may be too painful, shameful, or they are too afraid to bring it up for fear of being misunderstood. Understanding is critical for marital communication. To be understood means we have to be willing and able to share and are spouse has to be willing and able to understand us. It does not necessarily mean agreement, but it does mean acceptance. As couples we need to learn to speak the truth in love.

Speaking the truth in love involves both speaking the truth as well as speaking it in a loving way. Sometimes we speak the truth, especially when we are angry, but not in a way that let's our spouse know we love them. At other times, especially when afraid, we sit on the truth and don't share it. We may believe it is more loving to remain silent when it is not.

There are some questions I may need to consider before speaking the truth.

- 1. What is the truth?*
- 2. Do I really understand the truth myself?*
- 3. Do I have a misunderstanding or some confusion I need to clear up first?*
- 4. Have I thought things through enough?*
- 5. Have I kept the truth to myself too long?*
- 6. What will happen when I speak the truth?*
- 7. What could happen if I don't speak the truth?*
- 8. What am I afraid of?*
- 9. What am I angry about?*
- 10. How do I think my spouse is going to take the truth?*
- 11. Am I protecting my spouse or myself unnecessarily by not revealing the truth?*
- 12. What does God want me to do with the truth?*

There are some other questions I may want to consider as I think about how to tell my spouse the truth in a loving way.

- 1. Is this a good time to tell them?*
- 2. Are they too tired or stressed to listen?*
- 3. Can I phrase the truth in a non-blaming way?*
- 4. Am I ready to talk and not be defensive?*

5. *Can I ask questions and listen as well?*
6. *Do I have enough information to base my thoughts on?*
7. *Is what I am about to say kind?*
8. *Would it be unkind to keep it to myself and to have them find out from me or someone else later?*
9. *How would I tell my best friend what I am about to tell my spouse, and would they still be my best friend afterwards?*
10. *What is the most loving way I can put what I am about to say?*
11. *Will what I am about to say enhance or hurt the marriage in the long run even if it hurts in the short run?*
12. *Would God ask me or tell me in the same way I am considering talking to my spouse?*

God searches our hearts and minds. He knows the motivations of our hearts. Do I want to build up or tear down is a question he can answer? Is our motive to preserve and restore or to get even or relieve guilt at our spouse's expense. Are we hiding our sin out of a pretext of protecting our spouse or are we ashamed and protecting ourselves? Only God knows our hearts and can judge our motives.

Case Example

Tom and Martha had been married 28 years. When Martha first came for counseling she was devastated. She had just found out Tom had been having an affair. For the last three years while she was at work he was often with another woman. It seemed to her that everyone in her family and the community knew about the affair before she did. When confronted, Tom said the affair had been finished "long ago". But what Martha wanted to know was why hadn't he come forward himself to tell her? Why had she had to wait and find out about it from others? Not only was her trust lowered because of the affair, she felt his not coming forward lowered it further.

In counseling they tried to work on their marriage, but the affair hung over their heads. It was finally agreed upon that Tom would gradually reveal to her the details of the affair at her asking. He would only answer the questions she asked, but he would answer all the questions fully and painfully so no further suspicion would be cast over the marriage or the affair.

Are there areas in your marriage that you haven't discussed or revealed? Would now be a good time to have that hidden conversation about things that might be painful but once out in the open would "lance the boil of distrust" and let healing begin to the marriage.

If you can speak the truth in love set aside a time to begin to share with one another. If in the sharing you begin to become hurt or angry that is okay. Still, be considerate and gentle with one another. Remember these are sensitive areas under discussion. Sometimes it is better to break the discussion up into several small sessions.

Exercise

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. Ephesians 4:15

Please individually consider the following questions and then come together and discuss them as appropriate.

- 1. Is there anything I need to confess to my spouse?***
- 2. Will the confession help or hinder our relationship?***
- 3. What will not confessing continue to do to our relationship?***
- 4. Are there things I cannot talk to my spouse about?***
- 5. Is my conscience bothering me about anything I have not revealed to my spouse?***
- 6. As I consider the above, how can I express my thoughts in a loving way?***
- 7. Are there things I need to get off my chest?***
- 8. Are these things important?***
- 9. How can I say these in a loving way?***
- 10. Are there things I need to deal with in my own life that my spouse needs to know about?***
- 11. How can express my own issues without being critical of my spouse?***
- 12. As I consider the above, how can I best protect the relationship?***