



Missionaries to Ministers and Ministering to Missionaries

Couples in COVID-ville

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them to practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”

Matthew 7:24-5

Marriage foundations are being tested under the stormy pressures of COVID-ville. Wherever we call home on this planet we wake up to the same pandemic that has changed the culture. Sheltering with the spouse we vowed to love, honor, and cherish...til death do us part takes more effort than ever as weariness, isolation and fear plague our lives. Yet, willingness to grow is a vaccine for the heart. When we remember to love well and lean into the needs of another, the tension is relieved and the sturdiness of a solid foundation brings peace.

A leading marriage researcher, John Gottman, Ph.D., has found that people on average wait 7 years to go to marriage counseling. Seven years to fix a foundation problem. Can you imagine being locked in a house with a 7 year old problem? Maybe you can. It is time to come out of pain and find hope and healing. It is never too late to do the right thing. Here are some suggestions:

Unmasked Communication:

- Take a deep breath. Your brain needs oxygen in order to think of something helpful to say.
- Listen with your eyes
- Listen to understand, not to criticize or come up with your next thought. What did you hear them say (attunement is more than hearing. It is seeing and experiencing the other.)
- Basic template to discuss an issue:
Speaker: When you ____, I feel ____.
Listener: So when I ____, you felt ____.
- Advanced template:

Speaker: When I notice ____ (what you see, what you heard), I feel ____ (emotion, not thought), because I need and value _____. Would you be willing to _____?

Listener: Ok, so you notice _____, and feel _____ because you value _____? Did I get it right? Yes, I am willing to _____.

- Greetings: Hug or kiss hello and goodbye. Don't yell what you are doing as you walk out the door. Inform each other when in the same room.
- Focus on friendship - the base of a growing relationship is friendship. Consider what you need to do differently so that you are a trusted and enjoyable friend to your spouse.
- Compromise does not mean your voice is not heard. It is meeting in the middle and deciding that the relationship is as important **as** your individual desires.
- Remember the good: memorize 5 things you love about your partner
- Be generous with your time, words, and interest.
- Practice patience with ongoing anxiety.

Caution: Dr. Gottman has found these four signs of war in a relationship to be the most harmful.

Criticism (verbal attack)

Contempt (insult, abuse)

Defensiveness (victimizing yourself to ward off perceived attack)

Stonewalling (withdrawing to avoid conflict and convey disapproval)

Vaccine Considerations: Preventative Steps

Marriage Meetings:

Weekly for 30 minutes

Review finances, sync calendars, talk about kids needs

Boundaries:

Financial, Emotional, Physical, Sexual

Emotional Regulation:

7-8 hours of sleep, healthy food, social interactions with giving and receiving, and exercise are foundational. Seek treatment by a counselor and/or physician if you are not able to function in life and relationships. Mental health stigma is a harmful delay to hope and change.

A Helpful Handful of Friends:

Each of you need same-sex friends to talk to and experience mutual interests with.

References:

<https://m2minc.net>

<https://www.gottman.com>

Nonviolent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg