

Last week in the Pastor's Corner I pointed out that there are two kinds of marital conflict, Solvable and Perpetual. Today I would like to touch on some tips for how you can work to solve those solvable problems. It may take a little practice before these steps feel natural, but it's worth giving them a try.

Step 1: Soften your startup. Sooner or later every couple will have to sit down to work out an issue. This usually happens when one partner has a complaint or criticism about their spouse that needs to be addressed. Whenever such an issue needs to be brought up it is important to take care in how you initiate the discussion. More often than not, the outcome of a discussion is going to be determined by how it begins. If you broach a sensitive topic with criticism, scorn, or sarcasm there's an excellent chance the discussion will turn into a full blown fight and nothing will be resolved. Couples have a much better chance at resolving problems if they learn how to soften their start up.

So what does a soft start up look like? Follow these simple rules to start your problem solving discussions on the right foot.

- 1) Complain but don't blame. It's ok to point out things that you would like to see changed in the behavior of your spouse, but don't start that discussion with a character assassination. Keep personal attacks and criticism out of your complaints.
- 2) Make "I" statements instead of "You" statements. "I" statements can be used to present your feelings to your spouse without directly putting them down. Say "I'd like it if you would listen to me more carefully," instead of, "you never listen to me!"
- 3) Describe what is happening, don't evaluate or judge. When you bring up an issue that needs to be resolved focus on the details of what needs to be changed. Avoid overgeneralizations or value judgments. Your spouse isn't a loser just because they forgot to take the trash to the curb the night before it was supposed to be collected.
- 4) Be clear. Don't expect your partner to be a mind reader. If something needs to change, be specific about what you're expecting.
- 5) Be polite. C'mon, manners ya'll!
- 6) Be appreciative.
- 7) Don't store things up.

Step 2: Learn to Make and Receive Repair Attempts. If your discussion somehow goes off the rails it's important to know how to get it back on track. One way you can reset a discussion is to learn how to make and receive repair attempts. A repair attempt is something that you say during a conflict that is designed to let your partner know that you would like to de-escalate the situation. When first learning how to make repair attempts it's sometimes helpful to make it formal and obvious that that is what you are doing. So, if you are starting to feel stressed and tension seems to be rising, you could try saying something like, "hey, I'm starting to get stressed, can we reboot?" Or, be super obvious about it and say, "Hey! Repair attempt incoming!" When a repair attempt is accepted the tension can dissolve and discussion can continue.

Step 3: Soothe Yourself and Each Other. Men and women respond to stress differently and it also seems as if men react more quickly and strongly to emotional stress. Quite often this stress is experienced through something called flooding. Imagine a pressure gauge that is rapidly rising, showing that pressure is building. Once the pressure reaches its max there will be an explosion. In order for step 3 to work we need to start paying attention to our emotional state when having tense conversations. Once you start feeling that pressure rise and the flooding is about to happen it's time to stop. Nothing productive ever happens when one or both partners are feeling flooded. When you start to feel flooded

it's time to take a 20 minute break and do something else. Focus on an activity that calms your mind and allows your blood pressure to drop back down. Once you have calmed down you can try again – with a soft startup.

Step 4: Compromise. Nobody get's their way all the time. There has to be some give and take in any good relationship. Learn to accept the influence of your partner and seek to find middle ground. It's ok to give up some ground once in a while, it's not gonna kill you.

Step 5: Be Tolerant of Each Other's Faults. Look, nobody is perfect and sometimes you just have to put up with your partner's imperfections. I snore like a freight train and Amy has just learned to live with it. A little bit of tolerance can go a long way.

This was just a brief overview for of a process that can use to try to solve your solvable problems. If these tips don't seem to help you make any headway it could be that you are dealing with a perpetual or unsolvable problem. If that's the case, a different form of intervention may be what's needed and we'll touch on that subject in a future Pastor's Corner. Until then, try to follow the council of Romans 12:18 which says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone...including your spouse."

Have a Happy Sabbath
Pastor Tyler