

FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 2: “Dealing with our Fears...Develops our Honesty”

“Fully developed love expels every particle of fear, for fear always contains some of the torture of feeling guilty.” 1 John 4:18

I am of the opinion that **Honesty** is a critical key to building a strong marriage. I firmly believe that every marriage has room for personal individuality, and independent interests and separate activities. But I also believe that for a marriage to succeed in becoming all that God desires, (and most couples hope) it will be; there must be complete and transparent honesty.

Very few people live that way, in a relationship of total honesty. It's risky. Why, because of one of our oldest fears...the fear of rejection. Total honesty opens us to rejection. A book came out a few years ago called: Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I am? The answer goes like this: “I'm afraid to tell you who I am because if I really reveal what I'm like and you don't like it (what I am) then I'm up a creek, because I'm all I've got.” We often don't like to take that risk, so we hide or withhold complete honesty, and once we begin that; fear enters our relationships and often ruins them.

This morning I want us to consider how dealing with our fears might help us develop greater honesty in our marriages. We're going to look at the original first couple: Adam and Eve, in some verses from Genesis 3. Everything was perfect for Adam and Eve. They had every reason for a romantic relationship. He was never late from work; she never burned anything. There were no bills to pay; they had no physical defects, except for that scar on his rib cage. There were no kids hanging on to them, no in-laws, no clothes...everything you need for a perfect relationship. But sin entered the garden and brought a new factor called fear:

*“The Lord God called to Adam, ‘Where are you?’ He replied, ‘I heard you, so I hid, I was **afraid** because I was naked.’”*

Marriages have been struggling ever since. Let's consider how our unresolved fears dampen our ability to be completely honest:

1. MY FEAR OF MY FAULTS MAKES ME DEFENSIVE

Most of us hate to admit it when we make a mistake. We hate to admit weakness, or fallibility, or even a vague sense that we might be vulnerability. Have you ever found yourself defending a stupid decision that you know you made, or statement you made...just out of pride, and the fear of admitting that we were wrong? Before you were married your fiancée had an idealized view of what you were really like. Then after you got married the ideal became the real. The task many have chosen is: 'How long can I fool him/her?' That causes tension and stress, guardedness and reservation. Soon we are wearing masks in the one relationship more than all others, where God says: "No masks allowed". We've become defensive and there are two common reactions when we're defensive:

A. WE ACCUSE OTHERS

We blame our mates. We say "it's your fault, your problem, if you would have done, or not done, this or that, then I wouldn't have had to..." Look at this fact played out between our perfect couple, Adam and Eve:

"God asked, 'Did you eat...what I told you not to eat?' Adam answered, 'The woman you put here with me gave me the fruit and I ate it.' (Adam took it like a man... he blamed his wife.) She replied, 'The snake tricked me into eating.'"

Every since then, men have been blaming women, and women have been calling men 'snakes'. It's a part of life that we blame and accuse. We have faults and don't want to admit them, so we accuse others and often think: "If I admit a weakness, they may use it against me later."

B. WE EXCUSE OURSELVES

We pretend nothing is wrong. "I don't have any problems in my marriage. It's fine." If I ignore it maybe it will go away. And in the immortal words of Dr. Phil: "And how's that working for you...?" Pretending doesn't work:

"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth." I John 1:8

What are you pretending not to know about your marriage? What is the problem in your marriage that you're pretending doesn't exist? What are you defensive about? The tragedy is that a lot of marriages have problems that might be solved relatively quickly, but pretending perpetuates problems. Like the TV shows advocate: we must face our fears in order to be free from them. The way to get rid of your faults is to face them head on. Stop the insanity, of concealing, pretending, denying, accusing, blaming, justifying and making lame excuses. Confessing your faults and admitting your problems, is always a healthy first step in finding some resolution.

2. MY FEAR OF MY FEELINGS MAKES ME DISTANT

"God called to Adam, 'Why are you hiding?' Adam answered' ...I was afraid and hid from you because I was naked." Gen. 3:9-10

Hiding, hid, afraid, --- those three go together. Men typically withdraw when we're faced with emotions. Early in our marriage when Susan would become emotional, (usually over something stupid I had done) I didn't know how to handle it. Men typically become cool and detached and macho and .../...cowardly when faced with our feelings!

Women want men to talk, and sometimes to talk about 'feelings'. When we withdraw, they often push harder and harder, 'encouraging' us, and we withdraw farther and farther! One of the complaints I often hear is: "I just don't understand him. I don't have any idea what he feels. He won't talk to me. Before we got married, he talked all the time, now all he does it grunt. And he usually only grunts when he wants food, sex or the remote."

I read a quote in a book recently: “If more men were self starters, fewer women would be cranks.” We fear our feelings, so we become distant. Here are three feelings that frighten both men and women:

A. **HURT** FEELINGS

We don’t like to admit when we’re vulnerable. We don’t like to admit that other people can hurt us, but they can and sometimes do, even the people who love us. Have you ever played the popular “mind game” called: “Is something wrong”, with your spouse? Your mate is not a mind reader. The problem, when you don’t express your hurts, is that unexpressed hurts eventually become unresolved resentment. Hurts won’t destroy your marriage, if you know how to deal with them. But resentment can kill your marriage. Hidden hostilities pile up and can kill your marriage.

B. **ANGRY** FEELINGS

Anger scares many people. Many spouses are afraid to get angry. “I don’t want to rock the boat, so I’ll just sit here and be Mary Martyr or Matthew Martyr. I’m afraid to get angry because it might destroy our relationship.” It’s normal to get angry. God even commanded it: “*Be angry, and sin not.*” There is a right way to get angry and a wrong way to get angry. Anger means you care. Anger means you love. Sometimes you need to get angry. Jesus got angry sometimes. Sometimes you need to say, “I don’t like the way our relationship is going and I care about you and love you too much to let it just slip away.” Care enough to say something.

Every marriage has good and bad days. Sometimes your mate is a total class A jerk. Sometimes I know I’m irritating as heck. Sometimes we all are! The healthiest families are not those who never fight. The healthiest families are not those who fight all the time. The healthiest families are those who fight occasionally, but know how to fight fair, and how to make up, and compromise, and resolve and restore. You didn’t marry the wrong person. Anger doesn’t mean your marriage is on the rocks.

C. SEXUAL FEELINGS

It is interesting to me the first reaction Adam and Eve had after fear entered their relationship: They covered their bodies. Fear makes us self-conscious. Sex makes us self-conscious, largely because we are afraid to express our feelings about it. Like the story about the husband and wife who went to see the doctor. The doctor told the man, "you've got two weeks to live; now I'd like to talk to your wife privately." The man went to wait in the car. The doctor told the wife, "your husband is very sick, but he could live significantly longer if you'd do two things for him. Feed him a good healthy meal everyday, and make love to him every night." The wife gets into the car and the husband asks what the doctor said. She replied: "the Doctor said you're gonna die." The story illustrates two very important points:

1) Your mate is not a mind reader. Each of you must share your feelings, angry feelings, hurt feeling, sexual feelings. They are apart of your life. They are apart of God's plan for your marriage.

2) A little humor can do wonders for a marriage. Sex is a wonderful part of every healthy relationship. I remember Susan's grandfather; well into his 70's telling us 'newly weds' that: "We don't enjoy sex any less...we just enjoy it less often." It would serve us well to interject some loving humor in our relationships.

3. MY FEAR FOR MY FREEDOM MAKES ME DEMANDING

This is another root problem in many marriages. It's a power struggle; and that's the essence of what happened in the garden, and it has affected every relationship since. Sin does that! Some marriages have two very insecure people struggling for control. The husband acts like a dictator in order to prove his competence because he's so insecure. The wife reacts and rebels to prove her competence because she is so insecure.

And they live in a perpetual state of conflict. God doesn't mean for it to be that way. If you're doing that...STOP IT! You're on the same team! You cannot fix the problem until you stop fixing the blame. Work on the problem, not each other. When we focus on our rights in a marriage we live in a constant state of anger. "I have my rights!" WRONG! You gave them up when you got married! The Bible says that the husband is to lay down his life for his wife, and the wife is to do the same for her husband. Marriage is not a 50/50 proposition. It is 100% given and 100% given – both giving more than each are receiving. Besides, what makes you think you deserve a perfect mate? The only way to get a perfect mate??? Be a perfect mate! Well, friends, what is the antidote for the marital fears all of us face? When I fear for my freedom, I'm demanding. When I fear my faults, I'm defensive, when I fear my feelings, I'm distant. What is the answer:

TOTAL HONESTY !

A. BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

"The Lord gave us a conscience; we cannot hide from ourselves." Prov. 20:27

The starting point for a great marriage is being honest with yourself. Face up to the three things we have been discussing today, your faults, your feelings, and your fears.

B. BE HONEST WITH GOD

"We have no need to fear someone who loves us perfectly; His perfect love for us eliminates all dread." I John 4:18

That's the way God loves you – perfectly, unconditionally. God's says "You can come to me and admit your faults, feelings and fears because I'm going to love you no matter what." He already does. After you recognize them in yourself, and begin to admit them to God, you can then move on to step 3:

D. BE HONEST WITH YOUR MATE

"Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed." James 5:16

Start telling the truth to each other. You start caring enough to reveal yourself, and watch the healing start. What if your spouse doesn't accept it? This might be the greatest risk you will ever take in your marriage – to be **transparent!** Rick Warren calls it the “trauma of transparency”. M. Scott Peck in his book *The Road Less Traveled* described it this way: “The road to intimacy is through the tunnel of chaos.” Jesus said: *“When you know the truth, the truth will set you free.”* The truth will set you free, but first it might make you miserable. We don't like to face the facts, we don't like admitting our faults, we don't like talking about feelings, but that is the only prescription I know for building a marriage that pleases God, helps make people holy, and offers any prospect for our happiness!

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Are you tired of the guilt created by constantly defending your self against your faults? Are you tired of feeling guilty for the ever-present distance not sharing your feelings has caused? Are you tired of the guilt that always demanding your freedoms has created in your marriage? I have only one answer. Face your fear, open your heart, put it all on the table, become transparent. It's a risk, but it's worth it!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we have dealt with some tough stuff today. There are some here this morning, who want desperately to invite you into their lives and into their marriages. Give them courage to do just that today. Replace our insecurities with your love, replace our faults with your righteousness; replace our fear with your presence. Help us be honest, with ourselves, with you, and with our mates. AMEN

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_____ is a critical key to building a strong marriage.

1. MY FEAR OF MY _____ MAKES ME _____

A. WE _____ OTHERS

B. WE _____ OURSELVES

“If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth.” I John 1:8

2. MY FEAR OF MY _____ MAKES ME _____

“God called to Adam, ‘Why are you hiding?’ Adam answered’...I was afraid and hid from you because I was naked.” Gen. 3:9-10

A. _____ FEELINGS

B. _____ FEELINGS

C. _____ FEELINGS

3. MY FEAR FOR MY _____ MAKES ME _____

What is the answer: _____ !

A. BE HONEST WITH _____

“The Lord gave us a conscience; we cannot hide from ourselves.” Prov. 20:27

B. BE HONEST WITH _____

“We have no need to fear someone who loves us perfectly; His perfect love for us eliminates all dread.” I John 4:18

C. BE HONEST WITH YOUR _____

“Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” James 5:16

The greatest risk you may ever take in your marriage – to be _____!