

Life Notes *Family Matters with Pastor Cory*

5. Fighting Fair

INTRODUCTION

A pastor once told me that he and his wife never argued. He said they just had “loud discussions”. Haha! Well, whatever you want to call it, every couple does it. And far more often than most of us want to admit.

Conflict in marriage is going to happen. But too often these scuffles don't end well, because we don't fight in a fair way. We must understand that conflict in marriage is not about winning. It's about betterment. It's about understanding and meeting each other's needs. After all, the scriptures teach us to watch out for the interest of others, not just our own. When it becomes about winning, you're losing. This is especially true in marriage.

Every couple is different and there is no perfect way to handle conflict. But one set of principles has helped guide me through rough waters many times. It is saying the *right thing*, in the *right way*, at the *right time*. If an argument is had without any one of these three, a disaster may be looming. So here are a few tips to chart your course:

THE RIGHT THING

Don't dance around the real issue.

When dealing with a problem, be sure to be specific and direct. In an effort to be nice, a spouse may dance around the issue that is really bothering them. You need to be honest and deal with the issue at hand.

Don't chase rabbit trails.

On the other side, be sure not to go off on every other thing that bugs you. Focus on one problem at a time.

Don't nitpick.

Every issue doesn't need to be confronted. Pick your battles. Make sure you are bringing up issues that truly matter. I have seen far too many people walk on eggshells, because their spouse is critical. This is not healthy. A marriage should be a place of safety.

Don't bring up the past.

The Apostle Paul wrote this, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” When I feel I am losing a fight, my survival instinct kicks in. I begin to scramble for anything that will help me win. In marriage, that can mean bringing up past arguments or hurts. This is not the way to go.

Don't keep an arsenal

Joy and I didn't have the best pre-marital counseling. But the one thing that did stick was golden! On a video, a husband doesn't wash his dish

after eating. The wife reaches down, pulls out a ledger, and begins writing. On the ledger was an arsenal of issues she was just waiting to launch when it was most beneficial to her. This isn't a fair game to play.

THE RIGHT WAY

Don't bring a negative tone.

The old adage is forever true: it's not what you say, it's how you say it. Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” This includes tone too. If there is aggravation in your heart, there will be aggravation in your tone. This goes for body language as well.

Don't target insecurities.

This is the quickest way to “win” an argument. It's also the quickest way to drive a wedge between you and your love. If your wife is insecure about her weight, don't mention it. If your husband carries a wound from his father, don't bring it up. This is not loving or beneficial.

Don't be close-minded.

There are two sides to every issue. One of the best things you can do during an argument is understand their position. Be willing to see things from your spouse's perspective. This is helpful, even if you still disagree.

Don't dominate the conversation.

Joy taught me well in this area. One time, after years of talking over each other, she sat me down and said, “I need to talk to you about something. I want you to let me talk for five minutes, then you can talk. Is that fair?” In that, both of us felt we were heard. This was huge for our marriage!

THE RIGHT TIME

Don't force it.

Be wise in choosing when you deal with problems. If you know your husband is exhausted, wait. If you notice your wife had a rough day at work, hold off. Remember, love is patient.

Don't argue when angry.

The wisest man to ever live said, “...it is wonderful to say the right thing at the right time.” A serious discussion while angry almost never ends in peace. Be big enough to walk away and settle your heart. Even if this takes days, it will be well worth it.

CLOSE

Marriage is tough, but it is so worth the struggle! Every wife has failed. Every husband has blown it. Billy Graham's wife said, “A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers.” Amen. So throw the ledger out, forgive all from the past, and move on to conflicts that better your marriage. As we humble ourselves, God will help us.