

FamilyStyle



Resourcing Christian Family Advocates

On Stepping Up to the Plate!

by Dr. Jim Pettitt

It was a hot summer day, with temperatures in the 90's, not a cloud in the sky, and across the field the community swimming pool more enticing than it ever had. But swimming was not an option. I was stuck, in the heat, thinking of better things I might be doing with my time.



I had decided in early spring to play summer baseball, without the slightest idea of what that decision would require of me. Softball looked like fun from the bleachers – it was another story being on the field.

I was setting on the bench, keeping as cool as possible, when the coach called me to bat for an injured player. Knowing my nonchalant attitude about playing, he leaned close and said, “I know this isn’t so important to you, Jim, but it means everything to many of your teammates. They’re counting on you. It is time you stepped up to the plate.”

To everyone’s surprise, I successfully hit the ball between first and second putting me safely on base. The next batter hit a home run and as a result we won the game. Even though I was hot and tired, I was there when needed and it made a difference. While this wasn’t the only time I have been blessed with an opportunity to make a difference to those I care about, it was one of the most memorable.

In similar fashion, I believe it’s time for Nazarenes to step up to the plate and make a difference in the area of marriage. It is no longer debatable that marriages are in trouble in our society and in our churches. Current statistics reveal that over 20% of Nazarene marriages will end in divorce. That is a ratio far too high for us to tolerate. We must take strong and appropriate action.

Reading a book about marriage, or listening to stories about a marriage that has been rescued from the brink of divorce is exciting and dramatic, but not enough to change the tide of divorce. The reality of marriage and family ministries is that it is full of challenges. It is more like my ball field experience – a lot of commitment and effort occasionally punctuated by success. But, in the final analysis, it is essential to the life and health of families and the Church. I can hear Jesus leaning close and saying, “It may not always be glamorous, but it is important to me. Many homes and lives depend on your efforts.”

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Our denominational leaders have heard the challenge and have responded with a special emphasis called the Nazarene Strategic Marriage Initiative. Its purpose is to intentionally create and build strong marriages through premarital preparation, marriage educational resources, and growth experiences.

This Initiative has three phases. The first two, marriage preparation and marriage building, are preventative in nature. The marriage preparation ministry will help churches develop a premarital preparation plan and provide an opportunity for every Nazarene pastor to participate in a proven premarital assessment program.

The second phase focuses upon building healthy marriages. We are encouraging couples from every church to “step up to the plate” and to participate in a small group study on marriage or be trained in marriage building groups and/or Nazarene Marriage Enrichment Growth groups. This phase will help couples build strong, divorce-proof marriages.

The third phase involves intervention. We are asking churches and districts to send a list of approved Christian counselors to the Family Life Ministries office. These counselors will become a resource for pastors and congregations who find they need professional help for couples and families in crisis.

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See *Stepping Up to the Plate!***

GETTING DOWN TO THE BASICS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION

The apostle Paul cut right to the core of how we should talk to one another. He said, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:6, NIV).

Contextually, Paul was speaking of how believers should respond to outsiders, “we should make the most of every opportunity.” This was Paul’s commitment to being credible to the world. How much more then should we be grace-giving, salt-preserving communicators to the person we love the most—our spouse.

Perhaps our conclusions about communicating can be written as principles. We are not under the illusion that you agree with them all nor that they are all conclusive.

Principal One

People can’t be relied upon as effective message carriers.

We can blame it on our family of origin, our first grade teacher, or even the Fall, but we all have the natural inclination to drift toward irresponsibility in our talking. As the epics of our lives come and go we cannot be fully trusted to be reliable communicators. We have too many infirmities and quirks to be automatically endowed with the skill of carrying messages reliably over a lifetime.

Principal Two

Messages sent will invariably become garbled in transmission.

We push words up out of our current emotional state, expect them to waft through three walls from bathroom to hearth room; make their way through a different emotional state of our spouse and “eureka”, our message is understood.

Principal Three

It’s possible for messages to be kept from deteriorating.

At the time of sending we must be in touch—as best we can— with our thoughts and feelings; we must own them; we must believe them. We must intentionally be committed to learning new patterns of interaction.

Principal Four

A message may never be fully understood until it has good clarification.

We send, we receive, but we rarely talk about our miscommunication. To clarify what we are saying is to seek understanding not necessarily agreement.

Principal Five

Speaking for myself is an act of accountability not selfishness.

There’s a big difference between speaking about myself and speaking for myself. The latter tends to be egocentric, the former is self-ownership. And ownership of a message—my honest feelings, the interpretation of my thoughts, my intentions, and my actions are all a part of me getting in touch with my experience which makes me a better communicator.

These five principles go a long way in defining a healthy, mature marriage. But it’s more than health and maturity. We have to cut to the core of our mutual spirituality and address the issue of Lordship.

Seven Ground Rules for Talking with Your Spouse About a Crisis Issue

Both of you may be on the brink, and the subject you’re about to tackle may just push you over the edge. Use these guidelines to keep from stampeding yourselves in the wrong direction!

1. When one person talks, the other doesn’t interrupt, period!
2. When one person says, I just don’t think I’m ready for that yet, don’t press the issue. Take the subject at a pace both of you can manage.
3. When one says, “I feel,” the other shouldn’t convey, “You shouldn’t feel that way.”
4. Drop any question/subject that causes your spouse emotional pain. Some issues are just too painful to address.
5. Even if you think it’s harmless, absolutely no sarcasm.
6. Sit facing each other, hold hands, and use good eye contact.
7. Avoid raised voices; it erects an emotional wall that’s too much of an obstacle.



Growing Your Marriage Through Private Dialogue

1. There are times when we seem to feel jealous because of each other’s behavior.

What expectations can we establish about dealing with each other’s jealous feelings?

2. Sometimes I am concerned about your temper.

How could we deal with this constructively so that you don’t feel defensive?

3. I am sometimes concerned that you appear to be unhappy and withdrawn.

What can I do to help you move beyond your occasional feelings of discontent or withdrawal?

4. How can we help each other be more reliable and follow through on things?

How was dependability and follow-through taught at home?

5. I am sometimes upset or embarrassed by your behavior.

So how is this affecting our relationship? What can we do about it now, especially if it happens in public?

6. Sometimes we both seem too stubborn.

How are we handling impasses and stalemates? Are we comfortable with this? Why? Why not?

7. I wish we were less critical or negative about some topics.

How can we both work through chronic negative thinking and feelings? Let’s set some goals to deal with this when it raises its ugly head.

8. Sometimes we have difficulty dealing with each other’s moodiness.

What’s it going to take for us to face it and deal with it?

Duplicate and/or redesign the above dialogue exercise for use as: bulletin insert, married class hand out, couples weekend hand out, or lobby give-a-way.

THE EFFECTS OF SARCASM

by Rodney Wilson

While humor may appear to soften the blow, the unseen emotional damage of sarcasm can be devastating. I'm convinced many marriages die of a thousand emotional cuts instead of one deadly blow. A steady diet of sarcasm poisons a marriage—so it needs to be eliminated. No good comes from using it.

Trust, a vital ingredient in a healthy marriage, won't be present when a husband or wife is always braced for the next public or private cutting remark from a spouse. And respect won't be found in the midst of ridicule. A sarcastic environment robs a marriage of peace and joy, two parts of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life (Galatians 5:22-23). In essence, sarcasm severely limits the intimacy between a husband and wife.

There are plenty of healthy ways to fit humor into your marriage. Choose to break the sarcasm habit and die daily to yourself (1 Corinthians 15:31).

Stepping Up to the Plate From page 1.

There are three ways you can step up to the plate. First, encourage your pastor and/or district superintendent to schedule a premarital training event on your district. Second, pray about becoming a marriage building Leader Couple for your church. Finally, contact the Family Life Ministries office if you personally can recommend a Christian counselor in your area, and we will contact them and have them fill out an application to be part of our referral network.

Most importantly, find a way to participate. Your teammates (congregational members and friends) and your church are counting on you.

There's nothing like parenthood for teaching us the deep truths of the faith. Children, and life itself, are a gift. Seeing a new mother unable to take her eyes off her newborn child gives us some idea of how God sees us. Children have the power to transform us; as we respond to their needs, we become less concerned with our pleasures than with their nurture. — Kathy Coffey

TEN POINTERS FOR HUSBAND & WIFE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. Ask for each other's help as you commit yourselves to honesty and mutual respect.
2. Lay down weapons that crush the inner spirit. Address the issue rather than assassinate the person.
3. It's all in the timing. You have emotional clues that will help you with issues. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern them.
4. Avoid hip-to-hip shooting. You have a lousy aim from that angle.
5. Don't cultivate the bad habit of verbally swinging at your mate with omnipotence. You might "win" but it's not a good feeling. If both of you suffer from the need of always being right, go see a credentialed Christian therapist.
6. Listen to your tone of voice and obey your pulse rate.
7. Clean up the emotional mess with remission and forgiveness.
8. Graciously surrender when you're wrong. And keep quiet when you're right.
9. Wipe your mental and spiritual slate clean. Forgiven spouses are forgiving spouses.
10. If in an issue you allow revenge to set in, you have gone beyond the honest emotion of anger to the spiritual problem of carnal anger. And carnal anger will be the most accessible to your memory.

When you get slapped in the faith by someone consider it growth for you!

by Mikal Frazier,

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Has your child ever said something that borders on the disrespectful, and it really knocks you the wrong way? Has your spouse ever said an innocent remark that triggered your fight or flight response? Or maybe you remember the escalating quarrels depicted in the classic, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* If just one of them could have decided to take a hit and let them both cool down, what a difference it could have made.

I am talking about the little verbal jabs we've all given and received on occasion. They're like little arrows intended to pierce the heart or push our buttons.

There are several responses I can think of when a verbal jab has hit its target. One would be to ignore it. Sometimes this is healthy, other times not. Another would be to let the one sending the hit calm down. Then wait until an appropriate time to discuss the comment. A third response

would be to calmly address the jab at the time it's delivered. When a child delivers the jab to an adult, it might even be appropriate to calmly give a consequence.

A fourth way of reacting is to become angry and lash back; this would certainly not be a healthy response. This can lead to an escalating war of words with one jab after another leading to an artillery duel. The receiver, who is not able to take the hit, reveals the inner pain.

When you are taking the hit and not having to respond in kind, you are being a container for the sender's pain. When you do this, the sender then must face his own pain and failure to manage it in a healthy way. If you respond in kind, then the sender has accomplished his goal—to win at any cost. No one learns anything. There is no growth.

Take the hit. It will be growth for you. Your response will give the sender opportunity to grow and you will be acting in a Christ-like manner.

"Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" Matthew 5:39.

Contact the Family Life Office if...

... you need a good premarrriage inventory that has been well researched.

... you want to be trained to facilitate the above inventory.

... you want to schedule a God-called couple to train for Nazarene Marriage Enrichment leadership in your church.

... you want to schedule a marriage enrichment retreat.

... you need a consultation on how best to equip the couples of your church for marital growth.

... you want a video, dvd, or print media for a parents' support group.

Email: jpettitt@nazarene.org
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(Click on family)

Mom & Dad: How is God talking to your kids through His Word, through His church, through your family? What signs of change do you see?

How to Make Family Talk Safe for Everyone

An "I" message is any statement where you tell a family member something about your own thoughts and feelings. A few examples are: "I'm scared," "I feel lonely," "I thought about what you said, and it made me feel sad."

A "you" message is one in which you tell a family member your opinion or judgment about him or her. Here's an example: "You always sulk and walk off when you don't get your way."

Imagine a situation in which you might have used the statements below. Change them to "I" statements. When finished share the translations with your family members.

- Why are you always upset?
Do you always sulk like that when you don't get your way?
Why are you so uptight just because I'm watching television?
You keep trying to make me look stupid in front of my friends.
Why are you always spending your allowance without thinking?
Oh, stop it. You're acting like a child!
You should talk, I haven't seen you do any better!

Prayer: As a family seek God's counsel on how to say things right, knowing that you will never be perfect at it.

Four Aspects of Our Marriage We Can Openly Talk About

Place an X on the dotted lines below. Sharing "why" is crucial to your dialogue; make sure you feel safe with one another.

Cooperation

We respect each other's competence when it comes to resolving our differences. Rarely Often
We make the most of what each of us has to contribute when it comes to decisions. Rarely Often

Compatibility

We tend to work through our differences when it comes to money management. Rarely Often
We are able to share a basic approach to parenting our kids. Rarely Often

Emotional and Spiritual Support

When either of us wants to be cared for, we are emotionally supportive. Rarely Often
I'm satisfied with the spiritual nurture we give and receive from each other. Rarely Often

Intimacy

We ask openly of what we want from each other. Rarely Often
We put fun in what we do together—we're playful. Rarely..... Often

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