

Communicating in the Pressure Moments Pt.2

- Creating an Emotion and Communication Safety Zone in your Marriage

LWCC Marriage Ministries Email For July 2024

Greetings again from the Marriage Ministries Team. We trust you have survived the school holidays and that the winter is not being too unkind to you, what with all that it has thrown at us lately. I want to apologise at the outset if this email is a little long, but I think you'll understand once you get into what follows.

To begin this month's Email I want to briefly outline our intent for sending these monthly messages. Our intent first and foremost, is simply to give you material that you can use to intentionally sow time and focus into your marriage relationship. Let's face it, regular social kind of Date Nights are great, but many of us know that it's not that easy to actually sit down and have deep and meaningful dialogue together. So once a month we provide some hopefully practical material, on a variety of subjects and issues, that you might use as a catalyst for opening up some of that dialogue together. Any given month's particular topic, as I've mentioned a few times, may not be relevant to where you are at right at this moment, or maybe it's related to something you have already faced and got on top of. But at least, what we are trying to do is provide you with some hopefully helpful, topical, practical material that you can use to spend some time together, focus on each other, appreciate and encourage one another in the fact that here's something we have got on top of, or, to have a meaningful conversation around the particular topic at hand, that can help you grow and strengthen your relationship.

For many years - more than we like to admit to - Ronnie and I were not able to have those kind of deep and meaningful conversations. Many times we wanted to. Many times we needed to, but our communication skills were almost non-existent, and we constantly got threatened or challenged by such moments, and spent a lot of time walking around each other treading on egg-shells as it were. In those days we didn't have anyone we could talk to, and more particularly, we didn't have access to material like we have today. Some of you I'm sure can identify with that. Some of you can identify with that overwhelmed feeling expressed in the introduction to last month's email. So, part of providing these regular emails is to provide you with material you can use to have good conversations, then apply simple skills, ideas and applications to some of the challenging situations we can face in our day-to-day relationship dynamics. Because, if there's one thing we've discovered, many of the issues we face, that at times seem insurmountable, actually, with the right advice, skill sets, ideas and application, are not as insurmountable as we thought.

At the end of last month's Email I said that this month, "I want to explore what we could do to create a constant emotion and communication 'safety zone' in our relationship, that means that feeling stressed or overwhelmed from time to time, doesn't blind-side us, or cause us to walk on egg-shells skirting round some stuff for a period". As I've mentioned, some of you have probably only been there occasionally, but we used to be there all too often. So, if you've been there all too frequently, then creating a safety zone that limits, or stops, those egg-shell moments would certainly implement some significant lasting changes in your relationship. So, let's look at some steps you might like to follow to get this issue out there, and in the process introduce you to some keys that may help ensure we handle ourselves more appropriately in those awkward or challenging moments,

First of all, make a time to sit down together and go through the material in this email. You've probably read it through individually, so now how about making some time when you can fairly much guarantee that you won't be disturbed. (Might be good to also turn off your cell phones). Now, read through the email together out loud, each taking a turn to read a paragraph at a time, till you reach the end. Now, take a deep breath, because YES, I know, what's about to happen is probably not going to be easy. And Yep, I know what some of you will be saying - *we've been here before and it didn't go well* - and for some of you, it may well have been numerous times.

Recognising that, right now, the second step I want to suggest is to make a commitment to each other that, as you have this conversation, you will not huff and puff, you will not get that tone in your voice, your facial expressions will not change, you will not fold your arms or use intimidating gestures, you will not get moody or withdraw. Are there any other conversation killers I haven't mentioned - probably. But you get my drift!!! You are making a commitment to engage with each other, so you might also add in there that you will not interrupt each other while each other is speaking. And you will Not use the other classic killer where you accuse your spouse of being as bad as you are because - *last week, or last month you reacted aggressively when I said...so you are no better than I am!!!* Seriously though, be intentional about making this commitment to each other. If you've had problems with this in the past, then this is huge, *because one or both of you are probably, and naturally, coming into this with a degree of scepticism* - we've been here before and this did not end well!!! So this commitment to each other is pivotal.

DO WE HAVE THE SKILLS OR TECHNIQUES TO HANDLE OURSELVES IN THIS SITUATION:

Before we have the conversation about 'egg-shell' moments let's consider one further issue! Most often, the biggest factor in 'egg-shell' moments, is simply that when they occur, it's largely because we do not have the skills, techniques or things to say and ways to handle difficult or tense situations, so what we do is automatically revert to type; we huff and puff, change our tone of voice, fold our arms or.....!!! So here's a Third step to consider, and maybe apply right here. Because our feathers - as in the scenario outlined in the intro to last month's email - have been ruffled, because we've been caught off-guard or we're feeling a bit threatened, it's easy for us to get a bit amped up and go into reaction mode. But the most important thing we need to do right here, right at the beginning, is make a conscious internal decision to take responsibility for me and my actions in this moment: to make a conscious decision - to say internally to myself - that I am NOT going to react; I am not going to huff and puff..... Simply say to yourself, *"I am taking responsibility for me and how I handle myself in this exchange. My spouse is not looking for a fight- they simply have something important to talk with me about, so I am not going to react; I am going to stay in control of my emotions and engage."* Now for some, this will take some practice - for some like me, a lot of practice - but learning to take responsibility to control myself in the heat of a moment that catches you off guard, will make a huge difference, and will have a huge impact, going forward.

Maybe right here, in the process of applying this email, you also might like/need to add two further steps. A Fourth step: have a chat together about what this would look like for you guys going forward. Ask your spouse: *"How different would things look and feel for you, if, when you had something important that you needed to take up with me, you knew there was not going to be a reaction???"* Have a chat about that.

Maybe, in realising what this issue has done for you in the past, you need - Step Five - *to draw, as it were, a new line in the sand*. Maybe, right here, you could start by apologising to each other for the past; ask each other for forgiveness for the past, and make a commitment to change - to take more

responsibility to be in control of your emotions and reactions going forward, when misunderstandings or tension arises.

Hopefully, this conversation, and this series of emails, will then give you the skills, ideas, techniques etc., to make significant change going forward, so that 'egg-shell' moments become a thing of the past for you both. (Please be aware that if this topic is relevant for you, and you find the process a challenge, and you feel that you may need some coaching on the issue, you can call on us for that coaching. Please feel free to call us. We want to help. We are here to see the Marriages in our Church strengthened, and we'll do whatever it takes to help couples overcome areas they need to grow in. It's one of the key reasons we set this ministry up.)

There's no getting away from the fact that to create a safety zone you need first to open up the communication lines and have some good dialogue, and a good place to start is to have a conversation around 'egg-shells'!!!! So gentleman ask your wife - ask each other - if this egg-shell thing is something you identify with? Ask each other how you feel in these moments; what do I generally do that shuts things down?

What about some other questions that may be worth getting out there, while you're having this conversation:

- What conversation-killers do I use that shuts you down? or:
- What is it that I do that makes it hard for you to share with me or express your true feelings? or:
- When do you find it difficult to talk to me, or to share with me your feelings? or:
- What can we do to ensure we don't walk on egg-shells any longer?

If you've struggled in this area, believe me, we know these are not easy conversations to have. But we encourage you to be brave; give it a go; as mentioned, don't be afraid to ask for some coaching time. Imagine how different the environment in your home might be if you nailed this issue. Imagine how much safer your relationship would be, and imagine what impact this might have on the love levels in your home.

I've not really gone anywhere near where I intended to go in this email, which I guess means we may have to take this theme into another month, where we'll consider a few other questions we might like to throw around together, and in the process, look at, amongst other things, how becoming a better listener will really enhance the creation of an emotional and communication safety zone in your marriage relationship.

Blessings to you all from The Team: Stan & Ronnie, John and Karen