



Living Well

The Character of Marriage



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Compassion 2011

Developing Compassion in Marriage

Check out these websites for more information:

- For more detailed information about the ministry - www.livingwelloc.org
- Photos and writings about the ministry - www.livingwelloc.blogspot.com
- Encouragement/culture on marriage - www.livingwellinmarriage.blogspot.com
- Marriage events in the state, resources for marriage - www.marriagenetworkok.net
- Making Marriage Memorable blog - www.marriagenetworkok.blogspot.com

On the reverse side:

The Core

Red Flags (more)

By compassion we make others' misery our own, and so, by relieving them, we relieve ourselves also.
Thomas Browne, Sr.

Some experts believe that **compassion is the most important emotion for developing intimate relationships and that it contributes far more to happiness than love does.** When there is little compassion, a lot of love cannot compensate for the lack of compassion.

Why is compassion so important?

We know that it is part of the character of God. If we want to live as Christ, we will develop compassion in our character and in our marriage. As we study and understand the compassion that God has for each of us individually and for us as humans, we will see life as He does.

We will be compassionate as He is compassionate. We will see people and circumstances as He sees them. We will also recognize when others display compassion towards us and others.

Compassion sensitizes us to the individuality and vulnerability of our loved ones. It makes me see that my spouse is a different person from me, with a separate set of experiences, a different temperament, different vulnerabilities, and, in some respects, different values.

In contrast, if I feel the inten-

sity of love without feeling compassionate, I can't see my spouse for who he really is. He becomes merely a source of emotion for me rather than a separate person in his own right. When he makes me feel good, I think he is great. When he makes me feel bad, he becomes a demon. **Love without compassion is possessive, controlling, rejecting, and dangerous.**

Compassion, on the other hand, makes me protective, rather than controlling. The difference is critical. When I am protective, I want to help her achieve what is best for her. Most of all, I want her to feel okay about herself. When I'm controlling, I want her to feel bad for not doing what I want her to do.

The lack of compassion has some habits that are easy to recognize; each one can be redeemed and changed once it is recognized.

RED FLAGS & THEIR ANTIDOTES

1. Defensiveness

One way to spot a lack of compassion is when a person responds with defensiveness, especially if my spouse is accusing me of something. When I get defensive, I am saying "I didn't do anything wrong, you are wrong."

The antidote to defensiveness is to recognize the hurt behind the accusation, sympathize with the hurt, and even seek to alleviate the hurt. I can take responsibility for anything

I might have done to hurt the other person or to more fully explain what has happened, but not to accuse or attack back.

2. Criticism

Criticism most often attacks the character of a person – you are so stupid, lazy, or fill-in-the-blank. Even when it attacks behavior, it will be destructive if it is filled with blames, if it devalues, if it focuses on what the person has done wrong rather than how to do it right, or if it implies that there is only one right way to do things.

The antidote of criticism is first of all to recognize that we all make mistakes but that we all have worth and value. I have to apply that to myself in light of my past hurts. Then I apply this principle to those that I am criticizing. Then I can begin to think of how my spouse or children feel when I criticize them.

3. Stonewalling is said to predict divorce with more than 90% accuracy. This characteristic is very indicative of a lack of compassion. Recognizing and changing this characteristic, while becoming more compassionate, can change the tone and atmosphere of the marriage. Men tend to do this more than women. But stonewalling is when a husband refuses to consider his wife's perspective. He does not show her that he values her opinion or that she has anything to say that is worth hearing. If he listens at all, he does it dismissively or contemptuously. (continued on other side)

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Compassion at the Core

"Compassion will cure more sins than condemnation."

Henry Ward Beecher

One might assume that most marriages include compassion. Initially, most do. As marriage continues and **hurt comes through the front door, often compassion exits through the back door.** The person, whom we proclaimed to love until death, becomes the person to whom we show the least compassion.

What is compassion? The word origin means literally "to suffer with." The dictionary puts it this way "a feeling of distress and pity for the suffering or misfortune of another, often including the desire to alleviate it." Compassion goes a step beyond sympathy.

Compassion wants to do something to help. We see news articles on TV about great human suffering because of a natural disaster. We want to know how to help.

Some people seem to lack compassion in most situations, including home life. Sometimes, it is because they don't know what to do, so they tune it out. Sometimes, it is more of the sense that no matter what they do it won't help or it won't matter. For some people, it is even a "one-upmanship." They think or say "You think you have it bad, listen to what happened to me.... Or you don't know what it means to suffer, you have it easy compared to my life/my hurt"

I believe that at his/her core, every man and woman has

compassion in extreme situations.

Would I give up something or risk danger if I knew a child was about to die and I was the only who could save him? Most people would take that risk to save a helpless child.

But can I have compassion for my husband or my wife?

The Bible has a lot to say about compassion and mercy. **Any description of God's heart towards us includes compassion and mercy. The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.** (2 Cor. 1:3)

We see this description in Scripture over and over. He said to Moses, *The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to*

anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. (Ex. 34:6)

This quality of compassion is present not only in God the Father, but also in Jesus the Son. *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them.* (Matt 9:36)

God says that we can be like Him in the area of compassion and mercy because He lives in us. *This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.'* (Zech. 7:9) **Be kind and compassionate to one another.** (Eph. 4:32)

Compassion towards our fellow man and towards other believers includes compassion towards our spouse.

Red Flags & Their antidotes (more)

The antidote to stonewalling is listening to my spouse's opinions and valuing what she says, showing it in a way that she can recognize my interest.

4. Control We often try to control our environment and the people around us when we have lived in a home that was out of control or when we feel anxiety. We decide what our home needs to be like and how everyone

needs to act to give us a sense of safety and security and peace. People who try to control those around them don't realize that **control drives people away instead of drawing them closer.** The goal of control is then actually sabotaged by the demands or expectations of the one who is trying to control. The reality is that we cannot control other people. Instead of control, seek cooperation for common goals.

Ultimately, we must come to a place of knowing that God is the only one in control.

The antidote for control is trusting God to take care of you, regardless of what others do or what happens. **We have to care enough – compassion – about how others feel to help them achieve their desires and goals more than we work to get what we want.**