

WHY DO MARRIAGE PROBLEMS DEVELOP?

1. Inadequate modeling, teaching and quite possibly hurt and pain from our family of origin (FOO) with a resulting injured attachment experience.
2. Roles or defenses learned in childhood that protected the child *then*, but if maintained into adulthood, will block and hinder intimacy *now*.
3. Restrictions of emotional range and feelings. Feelings are indicators of “need”, so... if you don’t know what you feel you won’t know what you need. Feelings are often converted into *one feeling*. While this can go either way as it relates to gender, often for men this is anger and for women this is depression.
4. Wrong priorities such as an over focus on children or work / career to the detriment of the marriage.
5. Day to day as well as stages of life “stressors” that push weaknesses to the forefront.
6. Constant or chronic conflict without healthy resolution which produces resentment, bitterness and anger which results in seeing the other person as the problem.
7. The Biblical concept of “sin” includes the concept of “missing the mark”. All of us miss the mark daily in every aspect of our lives and fall short of God’s ideal.

GROWTH INVOLVES DISCOMFORT! ... WHY?

“If there is a way to “better”, it extracts a full look at the worst.” Yalom

1. Because change launches us into unfamiliar territory and growth takes us out of our comfort zones. This is often out of a childhood role or a “childlike” way of thinking which is how we coped in childhood.
2. Because we have to confront our own weaknesses within ourselves as well as accept them in our spouses. We would naturally rather defend ourselves and not admit that we have them and / or hate ourselves for being that way. Also we naturally want to blame others for our pain. Growth must involve a new found capacity to *integrate* good and bad within each one of us. That is, to learn to accept the strengths and weaknesses within ourselves and others.
3. Because present day hurts within marriage conflict often involve triggers that are *old* responses and feelings that have their origin in childhood experiences or pain.
4. Because we usually don’t see growth or seek help until we are *in* pain.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO TO GROW?

1. We must first recognize our own need to grow up developmentally, emotionally and into a secure attachment style versus focusing on the other person (I Corinthians 13:11, Psalm 139:23-24 and Ephesians 4:15). Often we are stuck in denial and blame of our spouses or children. We can also develop religious defenses that keep us from facing ourselves and growing. An example of this would be believing that we are the *martyr* or *persecuted one* and this is my “cross to bear”.

2. We must learn that “true love” requires a more mature perspective, “And this I (Apostle Paul) pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and discernment (Philippians 1:9).” The Greek “agape” love here described, involves God like actions for the wellbeing of others as opposed to a warm feeling of love (Greek “Phile”). Love then must grow and maturing as “knowledge” and “discernment” increases and improves.
3. We must make a decision to be courageous and make a commitment to the process of growth which requires hard work which is often painful! We can choose to *engage* or *run*. God does not often answer our prayer to “stop the pain”, because he would have to stop the *maturing process*.
4. We need to learn to become vulnerable (showing hurt and pain) and letting down defenses.
5. We are required to become humble and learn to confess our weaknesses and tell our significant relationships of our contribution to the problem.
6. We need to learn to forgive, that is the process of releasing ourselves as well as others from the prison cell of debt.
7. We must grow in our ability to *tolerate* as well as *cultivate* new emotions in ourselves and in others.
8. We need to adopt a redemptive faith in Jesus Christ which enables us to have the capacity and the power to change by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.