

SOME TECHNIQUES FOR MARITAL SURVIVAL

Betcher and Macauley suggest several techniques for marital survival. When a chaplain helps a couple learn and practice these techniques the chaplain can help the couple enrich their marriage. I will briefly review their suggestions.

First, take comfort in minor pleasures. Such pleasures may be as simple as a walk around the block avoiding all problems and talking about something you both love. Take time out to read to one another from a book you both love. Park the kids someplace and go for a picnic in the park. Belong to at least one social group or organization together – something you both enjoy.

Maintain cease-fire signals. Agree to a key word that is "time out" which signals a quarrel is escalating out of control. Agree to cease and desist from talking about the subject for at least one hour. Agree that during that hour they will be civil to one another. If the couple is religious, let them agree to pray, even if it's silent, for each other.

Be aware of gender differences. Seek to discover the hidden factors which impact a quarrel.

Learn negotiation strategies. In general these are: separate the people from the problem; focus on interests, not positions; invent ways that both sides can profit by coming to an agreement; and insist on some objective standard for the settlement terms. Negotiation has a strong appeal to one's sense of fairness.

Married couples should relearn what they tend to forget over the years: how to praise, to show affection and concern, to show sensitivity in small things, or to even use good manners. All too often these attitudes have been replaced by criticism, withholding, or emotional blackmail. The results are that both partners have lost value. Help the couple reclaim each one's value.

Finally, one suggestion of my own. As chaplains we take our model from Jesus of scripture. We find Jesus did not go around the country side saying, "I love you. I love you." Jesus *did* for people. He demonstrated his love for them by what he did for them. And he was *with* them. He conveyed acceptance by presence.

Through our life experiences, especially through our early childhood years, we have gained an understanding of how love is given. In order for me to love my wife I have to know how she understands love is given. When she expects me to help in the kitchen, to share in the workload, I cannot sit in the rocker in the living room reading the afternoon newspaper. I have to demonstrate to her that I love her in a way she understands.

If we chaplains are to help our sister and brother officers we must help them explore and understand their deepest values and feelings. And the deepest of these feelings is love.