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MFT: 509 Premarital Counseling

01/30/2023

Reflection Paper #1

In this paper I will reflect on the reading from both books, (*Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* and *A Lasting Promise*). We will take a look at 5 key points from both books that really hit home for me. The reading left me with some interesting things to think about, while also opened my eyes to some of my own strengths and weaknesses. Both books offered perspectives that I don't believe I would of even considered, giving me a fresh view on how my actions, words, and even unintentional behaviors may effect my marriage in some way. The 5 points that I will unpack are as followed.

1. *The triangle of Love passion, intimacy, and commitment.*
2. *How not to communicate, the styles of miscommunication,*
3. *Talking without Fighting, "That's not what I said"*
4. *Sensuality and Sexuality are different*
5. *Forgiveness and Restoration, "Regaining Trust"*

When I first met my wife we fell into a deep level of passion that was so intoxicating, I remember it like it was yesterday, no one, not even our parents could of told us we were not in love. Yet when I read the chapter on (*The triangle of Love, passion, intimacy, and commitment*) It brought me to a place of understanding. You see after the passion disappeared and the results of that passion which were 4 children sat in we started to question weather or not what we felt was really true. My wife complained about my lack of intimacy in the marriage, and as a young African American man that was a word I had no clue about. What was intimacy? was it just something she was bringing up to annoy me? We spent so much time together I felt like I couldn't breathe the passion had become overwhelming to the point that I lost my own identity. So this word intimacy was probably another way of her trying to steal my time, It was very hard for us at first but then we started marriage counseling. Intimacy like a higher form of friendship, yet learning how to get to know my wife on a deeper level seemed haunting and scary.

listening to my wife and really hearing her was a challenge for me because most times when I thought I was listening, I really wasn't. I was hearing what I wanted to hear, learning to trust each other with our vulnerable moment probably was one of the hardest things. I remember my wife not wanting to share feelings with me because of my failure to actively listen, this caused her to withdraw, and keep things to herself. After some time we both learned how to open up more to one another, trusting each other, and allowing each other to express our feelings. The passion was one thing, but the intimacy that followed with the help of our therapist really opened up the marriage to new and exciting potential. Which led to what was called relationship number 2, with all of the mistakes we made getting married young, we decided to devote ourselves to the commitment of relationship number 2. To love each other through our differences, loving each other through our miscommunications, loving each other through the good and the bad.

The Chapter of (*how not to Communicate*) really hit home for me, because in it I seen myself and all my past failures. "Silence is a powerful communicator" when I read this I put the book down walked out the room walked over to my wife and gave her a hug. All because I remembered how I felt when my wife would stonewall and weaponized her silence. Whenever she would feel annoyed or attacked she would shut down, and in turn I would stop communicating, this lead to feelings of "I don't care anymore". I would shut down and withdraw also, I remember our first therapy session I said the same thing that was said in the text "*she doesn't talk to me, she shuts me out*". The therapist just like the text book explained how the brake down in communication came from trust. It turned out my wife didn't feel like I would respect how she felt because I mostly dismissed her opinion, she didn't feel safe, so after a while she adopted what the textbook referred to as "*Placating*". My wife felt it was safer too simply just agree and go along with whatever I wanted. Yet I had a "*Blaming*" character, I sometimes found a lot of fault in the things she did. "*The best offense is a good defense*" working with my therapist he helped me understand that my failure to express fear and pain came from the lifestyle that God plucked me out of. When your in the streets you don't "open up", your taught to be tuff, expressing pain and feelings can get you killed. This point really helped me see the work God has done in my life, and my marriage, this

chapter made me realize when God says he is the author of your life, he already knows your flaws way before you do, and he helps you through a process of healing even if you have no clue its happening.

This leads me to our next communication lesson “*talking without fighting, that’s not what I said*” boy was this a challenge in my life. Not only with my wife but with my family and friends, I realize now in my life how combative I use to be. “*It’s wise to simply agree that the two of you may have differing perceptions about the same interaction*”, It’s safe to say this wisdom did not come till later in life. I will be the first to admit that my memory is not all there, but when I believe I said one thing and someone tells me I said another it really pisses me off. In therapy when my therapist would say “tell me what you heard her say” I would sometimes go off subject completely, this is when we both realized our listening skills and memory may be a little problematic. Those words alone sparked an understanding that I really was not listening to people, I realized that my past was holding me hostage, constantly. It wasn’t until I let go of some kinda of Perceived notion that I would be judged if I ever spoke my feelings that true healing began. I remember when I had a conversation with my older brother some weeks later when I said to him in conversation “so what I’m hearing you say is that you feel...” he was taken back because he said “Yes that’s Exactly what I’m saying”. I remember the feeling as if was yesterday, the feeling of gaining some sort of super power in communication, now my brother calls me more often, mostly to talk about his relationships but I welcome and value any and every conversation we may have now a days.

As I read on to the chapter on “*Sensuality and Sexuality are different*” I thought to myself “yeaaa finally, “lets talk about sex baby, lets talk about you and me, let’s talk about all the good things and the bad things sex baby”, (If you don’t know this was a song by a group called Salt-N-Pepa). But to my surprise it dealt with an issue that I didn’t really think about until this chapter. Was I being sensual or just sexual? Sensual was none-sexual touch, and sexual was physical sexual touch. The chapter was right, as time goes by you tend to fall into a routine or pattern of Intercourse, not taking into account a lot of the old behaviors. I remember when my wife and I would hold hands randomly even in our sleep sometimes, I remember forehead kisses and cuddles for long hours, I remember just rubbing each other’s backs from time to time, I remember rubbing each other’s feet after work. What happened to us? Was it the everyday

mundane of life? Or did we just simply forget about each other. When asked, my wife communicated that she would love to get back into the habit of doing those things, and not just focusing on the love making part. I'm actually glad this topic was brought up because sometimes life happens so fast, filling up with work, and kids, that we often forget our relationship still needs attention. So this past weekend we decided to be Purposeful in our actions, as we went on a date we held hands for most the time, even in the car, on the drive to New Jersey we held hands most the time. We also fed each other which sounds kinda weird but we fed each other different foods as we tried what the other had ordered, we also rubbed each other's backs. Let me tell you it brought back so many memories that it felt like we were 23 again. I have to credit "*A lasting promise*" for showing me the way back to a more intimate marriage.

As we get to the last point "*Forgiveness and Restoration, "Regaining Trust"* I feel as if God has his ways of showing us how he covers and keeps us over time. In this chapter it brought all my thoughts together from communication brake downs to lack of intimacy, in this chapter it makes light of the two key points if regaining trust in a relationship which were "*trust build over time*" and "*Trust has the greatest chance to be rebuilt when each partner takes appropriate responsibility*". Both of these key points highlighted how God used our marriage councilor to push us toward a more rewarding and fulfilling relationship. He allowed space for growth and healing. It was not easy allowing ourselves to be Vulnerable with each other, especially after so much hurt, at times I almost thought we wouldn't make it, but God!. This chapter reminded me how important it is to allow grace to do its work and never giving up on what God has placed in your life. Taking responsibility and accountability for my own actions opened up a new door for both trust and maturity to come in. Allowing space for forgiveness was important in building back trust, The reading put it this way ("*If you have hurt your partner, take full responsibility for your actions, whether or not you meant to hurt him or her. You validate your partner's pain and loss by doing so. When you have sinned, ask God to forgive and cleanse you*"). God has been my rock of forgiveness, for without him I would of turned my back on those who loved me and maybe never coming to the understanding that pain can be mended.

In conclusion I absolutely loved these books because it allowed for me to take a step back and see all the good that God has done in my marriage that I wasn't paying attention to. I remember when things felt hopeless when I wanted to give up, when I prayed every night for things to get better. I didn't understand why God would want me to Pursue a career in MFT but as I'm reading through the material it's starting to become clear that God has used this field to do a work in me that other wise would have been difficult. It is said that God has a greater plan for us then we know, but this course has helped me realize that I have purpose and that things like forgiveness and communication are bigger than just the marriage. But it's also a part of who we are to one another, holding ourselves accountable to our behaviors, emotions, and feelings this is what builds a well rounded believer, and the reading has made this ever more clear.