

Reflection Paper

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The first Profound Point I found in the reading was Robert Sternberg's "triangular model" of love. The three sides of love are passion, intimacy and commitment. Passion is recognized as the biological side of love, which is characterized by arousal and desire for a physical relationship. Intimacy is the emotional side of love; intimacy involves fully knowing a person. Commitment is the cognitive side of love, which involves choosing the same person despite feelings or external circumstances. Sternburg also concludes that there are four love styles: Consummate love has all three sides equally matched; Romantic love focuses on intimacy and passion; Foolish love is a combination of passion and commitment; Companionable love is centered on intimacy and commitment.

As a youth pastor, this triangle is very helpful in helping students understand the foundation of love. Teenagers will seek out relationships that are in the romantic style than anything else. They seek validation and intimacy from their partners and are driven by their hormones. Furthermore, their definitions of love are often absorbed consciously and unconsciously through social media. I think that discussions and broadening their understanding of love is important.

In assessing my marriage, I believe that we've touched upon consummate love but have gone through seasons of life where maintaining consummate love has been difficult. Being both a full-time student and a full-time pastor, the time spent with my family is very limited. Due to the lack of quality time, my wife has expressed her desire in seeking romantic love. Because of my many responsibilities and tasks, my current stage of life has me seeking companionable love. Despite the differing expectations, my wife and I are working on both the passion and the commitment elements of our relationship.

The second Profound Point is that marriage goes through predictable stages of love (Parrot, 55). Although unexpected changes may change the course of the marriage, there is a gradual progression through the stages. The stages are identified as: (1) romance; (2) power struggle; (3) cooperation; (4) mutuality; and (5) cocreativity. I had always thought that there were similarities in most marriages but had never come to the realization that there is a progressive and systematic movement towards a deeper marriage. Most television shows, especially dramas and sitcoms involving multiple generations, seem to indicate that most marriages end up in a continuous cycle.

When assessing the current stage of love in my marriage, I believe that we have progressed into the mutuality stage. The Romance stage was very short in my marriage for several different reasons. My wife and I had only dated for two and a half months before getting married, and our first child was a honeymoon baby. Because of the sudden changes in lifestyle, we had an extended power struggle stage. However, the biggest challenges to our marriage happened during the time after the birth of our second child, Adelyn. It was during this time that I was finishing up my Masters of Divinity as a full-time student while working as a full-time youth pastor. The closeness and the quality time that my wife had wanted had decreased tremendously and we had a hard time navigating our evolving marriage. The financial strain of having two children began to build up. It was the pandemic that brought balance back to our relationship.

Becoming less enmeshed helped us move towards the Cooperation stage. My wife hadn't worked since immigrating to the States so that she could focus on childcare, which is what we had agreed upon. My wife began to work during the pandemic, which also added to the growth of our marriage. As my wife understood the psychological toll the pandemic had on my youth

group students, she encouraged me to start the MFT program and we've been blessed by that decision. In addition, to help confirm my assessment of being in the mutuality stage, my wife and I were identified as a 'harmonious couple' through the Prepare Enrich assessment.

My third Profound Point is found in Virginia Satir's four styles of miscommunication (Parrot, 92). The authors point out that the breakdown in communication occurs when one person is afraid to deal with some sort of emotional pain and often uses methods to hinder communication. Virginia Satir identified four types of miscommunication: placating, blaming, computing and distracting. Placating involves one person trying to just accept whatever their partner wants. Blaming will direct their anger through blaming their partner with criticisms and generalizations. Computing involves a very emotionally measured response, often hiding the emotions that one feels. Distracting will try to avoid the conversation at hand.

This profound point made me realize that I use all four types of miscommunication during conflicts with my wife, with computing being the go-to response. My wife, on the other hand, will often use the tactic of blaming. Though not fully intentional for each conflict, there is a tendency to fear the complete intimacy that can only be found in a marriage. On one level, I believe that as we connect more deeply with our spouses, the underlying fear becomes. "What if my spouse can't love me for this particular aspect of me?" It started with the actions of Adam and Eve. Once their eyes were opened after eating the forbidden fruit, they began to hide the most intimate aspects of each other, particularly the areas that made them different. That fear is embedded in all relationships today. Because that fear is so natural to us, I believe that over time we become accustomed to the miscommunication tactics of our spouse and eventually accept their responses. Personally, when I start to see these responses in my communication with my wife, my mindset has to shift to address that fear of intimacy that I may be feeding.

The fourth Profound Point is “knowing how to fight well” (Parrot, 135). First, couples are told to engage in conflict. Most couples fear conflict, but couples can grow and mature through conflict. Second, couples should learn to choose their battles carefully. 90 percent of issues that are bickered about can be overlooked. Third, couples should define the issue of their conflict. Couples will often engage in conflicts without addressing or understanding the source of the conflict. Fourth, couples are encouraged to state their feelings directly. Using “I” statements will prevent one’s partner from becoming defensive and one can address how a particular behavior affects oneself. Fifth, rating the intensity of feelings can lead to a better assessment of what is important to one’s partner. Sixth, couples should avoid put-downs. Finally, couples should move to end the fight.

Being raised in an Asian-American culture, my parents did not model conflict resolution well. My parents tended to be passive-aggressive when they addressed conflicts. For the most part, my family will try to process and resolve their anger and conflicts quickly. Perhaps born out of an obedience to Scripture, we were in the habit of apologizing quickly. In retrospect, it was more of stuffing our feelings than resolving the conflict. The thing I hated the most was when my mother would criticize family members just loud enough for us to hear her displeasure without physically addressing us.

I carried my family’s conflict resolution methods into my marriage, as my wife had brought her family’s conflict resolution methods. At the start of our marriage, we did not fight well at all. Conflicts were hard for my wife because she had no family members in the States. So for peace, I would try to resolve the conflict as quickly as possible (emphasized by my family of origin). Over the past ten years, although the fear of conflict has dissipated, my wife and I have

yet to manage conflict well. The biggest growth areas are the sixth and seventh suggestions: avoiding put-downs and ending the fight.

The final Profound Point is the two Ground Rules suggested in “A Lasting Promise” (59-67). The first ground rule is to call a “time out” when the conflict is escalating. Time Outs are not to be attempts to avoid speaking about an issue, but to intentionally take a step back to decrease the conflict. Time Outs are to stop unproductive arguments, a type of temporary truce. A time should be set to reengage in conversation. The second ground rule is to be intentional in setting times for positive activities together. During those moments of togetherness, issues of conflict should not be brought up or discussed.

As deeper conflicts emerge in my marriage, my wife and I have been increasing in lengthening our conflict. The last big conflict between my spouse and I lasted 6 days. For each subsequent conflict, the average amount of time we keep it unresolved keeps ticking upward. For the most part, as mentioned earlier, I will get over my conflict within 2 hours as I come to grips with my reactions. My wife takes a longer time to process and will need to be left alone to her thoughts during this time. We had never agreed to set a time and place to resume our conversation, so our silent treatment tended to increase in length. Having an option of time outs would greatly improve the resolution of any conflicts.

Looking back on this past year, I realize that I need to be more intentional in having quality time with my wife. Having children early in our relationship, in conjunction with my responsibilities as a full-time pastor and student, quality time was in short supply. By the grace of God, I have several marriage classes this semester, one of which I am attending together with my wife. The Marriage enrichment class has challenged us to discuss things we haven't before,

but most importantly, allowing us to have a moment to ourselves. I hope that my marriage can continue to become stronger through all the lessons learned through this MFT program.

Works Cited

Parrot, Les and Leslie (2015). Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask

Before and After You Marry. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

Stanley, Scott M., et al (2014). A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your

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