

# The Gift of Daily Dialogue

On our marriage encounter weekend we heard on Saturday night about "The Gift of Daily Dialogue," and we really believe that it is a special gift for us. It is a way that we can daily express our deep love for our beloved by sharing our feelings with him or her. What a beautiful way to share our lives together—each day bringing alive the warmth and closeness we experienced on our Marriage Encounter Weekend.

What an opportunity we have to recreate our spouse's self-image and also to see more of our own self-worth through the eyes of our spouse!

Our daily 10/10 is a means of developing and deepening the openness and trust and love that we have for each other.

When we do get home from our weekend, we sometimes run into some stumbling blocks, or will have some questions about our dialogue. We hope to give you a few suggestions or aids to help you with your dialogue.

## *Feelings*

When we get home and are on our own—we find ourselves trying to remember all the rules of thumb that were presented to us about feelings and often we end up in a state of confusion and sometimes frustrated.

As we first start dialoguing we all write in our love letters and share in our dialogues more of our judgments than our feelings. We are always feeling **THAT**—this is the area that most of us err in. I *feel* followed by THAT is a judgment and not a feeling. When we write this or say "I feel that" we have to pause and find out how we really do feel about this thought or judgment of ours. Many times we are hiding our feelings behind our thoughts and judgments.

We have a tendency to try to justify our feelings. Each time we say "why" or "because" we have to stop and remember that there is no need to justify feelings because feelings just are and they are who we are. When we write that we feel guilty, stupid, rejected, or inadequate, we are not writing feelings as much as we are making judgments about ourselves.

Our feelings are what we share with our spouses in our dialogue, since our feelings are more the core of who we are than our thoughts and our judgments. Our thoughts and judgments are our opinions and appraisals of things we have worked out in our head, while our feelings are from the depth of our being. Our feelings are spontaneous and we have no control over them—they are automatic responses to situations.

For years a lot of us have been trained to suppress our feelings and now we are trying to express them lovingly in our love letters and dialogue. The more of

ourselves we can put into our love letters and dialogue, the more believable our love is for our spouse the more joy and closeness we can experience in our relationship with our spouse.

One thing about feelings—and perhaps the most important—is that there is no morality to feelings. Feelings are neither right nor wrong—they just are. We can't quarrel with our own feelings or even with our spouse's feelings—we just have to share them lovingly and honestly and the result will be a beautiful growth in our relationship.

### *Love Letter*

The love letter is the springboard to our dialogue, and its purpose is not to just get feelings out—it shouldn't be a grocery list of our feelings; the purpose is to build toward a total awareness of each other.

We go to our notebooks with a very strong desire for our spouse for a real deepening of our relationship. In order to do this we find it essential to start our writing with a brief prayer to our Father. Many couples say a spontaneous prayer and others write their prayer in their notebooks. Quite often our prayer is one of thanksgiving and also one of petition—asking our Father to guide our hands as we write to our lover and to give us the openness, honesty and trust to reveal our true selves to the one we love more than anyone else in the world. Prayer is essential for our dialogue since our concern and strong desire for a closeness in our relationship is our response to God's Plan for us.

To really make our letter a love letter, we try to keep our spouse in mind the entire time as we write. A good way to start focusing on our spouse as we write our love letter is to tell them of the special quality we see in them that day, and the use of endearments helps us to focus on each other too.

When we describe our feelings in our love letter, we have many different avenues to choose from, including physical description, music, food, nature, past experiences, color, sound, taste, touch and smell. Not all of us can relate to all of these various descriptions. Each individual couple must discover for themselves which area is best for them to describe their feelings and which area their spouse relates to easily. What is really important for us to remember, however, is to bring out our feelings in the context of our relationship.

On the weekend all the distractions of time, job, phone, children, school, household tasks, relatives, friends, etc. were eliminated. However, when we get home, it is really a discipline on our part to try and find our prime time each day to sit down and write our love letter to our spouse, and then again later to find that perfect "no distraction" time for our dialogue. It takes time for all of us to work at finding our own prime times. And schedules do change too—so we have to try and not become discouraged, but always make an earnest attempt to put our daily routines and distractions aside and write our love letter and dialogue during our own prime times.

## *Exchange and Reading of Love Letter*

We have found that our exchange has a very important affect on our dialogue. It really sets the mood for us. A casual exchange will usually mean a casual dialogue while a tender and loving exchange will create an atmosphere of care and love that will give us a great desire for more. Remember—we are giving and receiving the greatest and most precious gift we can offer—the gift of ourselves to our beloved.

As we read, again as when we were writing, we must get ourselves deeply immersed in our relationship and in the feelings our spouse is describing to us. We must be careful not to get side tracked as we read and want to know why our spouse might feel a certain way. We just want to try and experience our spouse more fully, so we can love each other more completely. After we have read our spouse's love letter the second time, we put our books aside.

### *Dialogue*

A lot of couples pray together holding hands and looking into each other's eyes as they begin their dialogue. Just knowing our Father is present with us is soothing and reassuring. We can ask too, in our prayer, for trust and openness to share ourselves as fully as possible.

After reading our spouse's love letter, we each share our response feelings we have right then, whatever feelings are stirring within us after reading the love letter.

We dialogue on how we feel after reading the love letter—NOT necessarily on a feeling in the love letter. We dialogue on now feelings. After each spouse shares his and her response feeling, one of the feelings is chosen to dialogue on, usually whichever one is the strongest, or most difficult to share. We then begin our 10 minutes of dialogue, trying with as much earnestness as possible to experience our spouse's feeling in some small degree, or helping him or her to get a taste of our feeling.

We might ask our spouse: 1) Is it like? Then describe how you think it feels. 2) Have I ever described to you a feeling like yours? 3) When have you felt like this before? 4) What feelings surround this feeling? What intensifies it? We dialogue on feelings for a maximum of 10 minutes.

My focus and reason for dialogue is simply to sit down and tell my lover who I really am, how I really feel about him or her, about myself, about us, our past, present and future. To reach out and experience each other as persons in a deep relationship. Sharing feelings of trust in dialogue opens us to the decisions and discussions and problem solving that is part of every day life.

### *Select*

As our dialogue for each day ends, we select a question for tomorrow. It is really important to pick the question for the next day right after our dialogue. When we put it off and pick it the next day, we quite often end up writing at some time other than prime time, and we can't give our best to each other.

When we get home from our weekend and we don't have the team giving us our questions, we usually get hung up in selecting our questions. Questions should be pertaining to our own relationship. Some areas where unlimited questions can be selected are: sex, death, God, and possessions. Scripture is a beautiful source of dialogue for many couples and clergy.

Sometimes we think that our dialogues are flat and blah. We want them to be like the ones on our weekend. Sometimes they are good as, or better than, the dialogues we had on our weekend. There are some days when we seem to be crawling in our growth, and then there are some days when we think that we are leaping—the great thing is that we are crawling and leaping together in our relationship.

In closing, we wish you love, tenderness, openness and a real growing in your own individual love relationship. Remember we are all unique and special, and so are our feelings. My feelings are like my fingerprint, the color of my eyes, and the sound of my voice, unique to me and unrepeatable.

In John Powell's book, *The Secret of Staying in Love* (excellent reading) it is stated, "The diamond is the person, but the setting that brings out and illustrates all the facets of beauty is the feelings. Without the setting the diamond couldn't be seen and admired. Without the feelings, the person — you, your spouse cannot be known."