

WEEKEND TRAVELER

For this issue we are going to change just slightly the format and talk about our marriage journey - where we have been, where we are, and where we are going. So join us now as we take a journey through our marriage.

THE JOURNEY

Marriage is not a stagnant event or situation. It is not a pinnacle to be achieved and then left in the past like training for the Olympics. The relationship of our marriage changes and evolves with each day. We grow closer; we work at being more intimate, open, honest and loving; or we set a course of listless drifting which leads us apart down different paths. The journey is a tough one and there is no easy solution or superhighway to follow that guarantees success. Each day we make decisions as to our course together; each day we recommit our love to each other. If we don't, our paths go astray just a bit and our journey takes a rougher course, but nonetheless we continue the journey for better or for worse.

Look back for a few minutes as to where your journey has been. What were some of the most exciting and most romantic times of your courtship? Were you really prepared for your marriage or did you plunge into it like a skier going down an unknown mountain in the dark (Wouldn't an Engaged Encounter weekend have been a beautiful illumination of the path ahead?) Your marriage day came and you began your lifetime together. Discussions gradually became less romantic, less intimate. Soon our discussions came to resemble the six o'clock news --an exchange of the facts of the day, occasionally with a personal slant or bias, but devoid of feelings. A nice adequate routine that made the decisions of our journey seem less painful. They were less painful -- usually, but particularly when we let others make the decisions of our journey for us.

Then a new route called Marriage Encounter appeared along our journey. If you are like us, we were aware that this program existed for some period of time before we ventured on this course. The road wasn't easy at first; it took more effort than we had been used to handling in our relationship. At first our old path was still visible and even tempting to follow once again, but soon it was clear that we just could not turn back and really didn't want to try. We had been challenged and we would never be the same again. Had we won the gold medal?

Where has your journey led you since your weekend? There are probably as many patterns as there are couples who have experienced a weekend. However, let us suggest some patterns which may be similar to yours.

- We dialogued faithfully at first, but have let it slip. It sure was nice, but it is too hard now.
- We dialogue occasionally and it is worth it. We could do more, but at least we do some.
- We dialogue in spurts. When a problem arises we dialogue for a while to get back on track.
- We don't dialogue.
- We dialogue every day. At first we seemed to be drawn closer with each dialogue, but now we just continue each day out of force of habit. Maybe the dialogue honeymoon is over, but we haven't stopped.

Do you see yourself or something close? Wherever you are, from the daily dialoguer to the never dialogued and all points in between, the rest of the journey is for you. **YOU DON'T NEED THE JOURNEY, YOU DESERVE THE JOURNEY!**

THE TEST

Before we continue let's do a little reflection. Where is our marriage relationship today, right now? When we aren't dialoguing what do we talk about most? Select the one description that best suits most of your conversations.

1. Our busy schedule or activities
2. Our work
3. Our finances
4. Our children
5. Our most personal feelings or plans

Before our weekend the first description, our busy schedules or activities, would have fit us quite accurately. Are one of the first four still the most accurate now when you are not dialoguing? It isn't easy to have the last description be the one that describes us. It takes conscious effort and work.

Now we know that most every test in life has a passing and a failing mark. However, in this case your answer of one through five above is neither passing nor failing; that is determined by where you go from here. Will you look honestly at your intimacy all day long and not just when you dialogue? Can you change your journey to include intimate, feeling level communication throughout the day? We know you can, but will you? Only you can answer that..

THE CHALLENGE

Let's look at dialogue for a moment as we set the course for our journey from here. Should dialogue be perfected? Should dialogue be a daily ritual? Is dialogue essential?

The goal of a Marriage Encounter weekend is more intimate communication and thus a stronger marriage relationship, which in turn exemplifies the vocation of marriage. Your visible sign, when multiplied with all other Encountered couples, signifies to others that marriage can be a vehicle for unconditional love. The best means of achieving more intimate communication is through dialogue. The more it is done on a regular basis, the more it will influence and change our love relationship to make our marriage better.

Dialogue is not the end product, but merely a means of achieving intimacy. We should do the best we can at it, but there is no perfect score to be achieved. It leads us to being closer and sharing our feelings all day long, so it is not an isolated ritual. If we never talk about feelings when we are not dialoguing, then dialogue has really missed the mark in its place in our life.

Now at this point you may be wondering how you can talk and share about feelings throughout the day. There are many ways and we offer but a few. At meal times talk about your feelings relating to the events of the day - put the events second. When you need to make a decision, ask each other how you feel right now. Share this as much as time permits. As you move into the decision, review your feelings along the way and again when a conclusion is reached. Be intimate and sensitive to each other after the work day. Don't ask what the other did, but rather ask how they felt doing their tasks and don't worry about the events. Do all of this with love, patience, tenderness, sensitivity, more patience and prayer.

Where will your journey lead? The answer is, wherever you want it to go. As we share this, our last Weekend Traveler with you, we wish each of you good luck with your journey and hope our paths cross many times in the future.

One final thought. Next time a friend, coworker or neighbor seems troubled or hassled ask them how they feel and then just listen -- really listen and don't be judgmental. Maybe the friend will turn out to be your spouse, so lovingly hold each other while you listen.

Suggested Dialogue Questions

- 1) What feeling do I need to most share with you today? Describe in loving detail.
- 2) What are my feelings about where I have placed dialogue on my priority list?

Suggested Sharing Questions

- 1) "Dialogue is not the end product but merely a means of achieving intimacy". What does this say to me?
- 2) Where is our marriage journey taking us right now? And how do I feel about that?