The Triangular Model of Love

Triangle One: God-Husband-Wife

This diagram shows the relationships between a husband, wife, and God. Both the husband and wife have an individual relationship with God as well as a close relationship with each other. Notice that as the husband and wife grow closer to God, they actually draw closer to each other. This means that a vital part of a husband and wife’s relationship is their individual relationship with God. If one of the spouses is growing closer to God and the other is not, the triangle’s shape gets out of balance. This is very evident in marriages where one spouse is a believer and the other is not. For non-Christian marriages this triangle is still in effect although is not used by the couple. It is important to understand that the spiritual aspects of marriage is the most intimate part of marriage because out of it all other aspects of the relationship are developed.

Triangle Two: Intimacy-Passion-Commitment

Commitment/Decision
The commitment/decision part of love is a choice. It is seen when a couple decides that they will stay together for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse. It is not based on feelings that go up and down. It is the decision to stay when the going gets tough. It is also the basis for marital love that provides the safety that couples feel knowing that they are committed to someone who will honor their trust.
**Intimacy**

Intimacy is the friendship part of love. It is where couples can share their hearts and feel they are best friends. Many people would classify intimacy as the sexual part of sharing each others hearts, of trusting each other with hopes, dreams, fears, etc.

**Passion**

Passion is the exciting part of love. Sexual love is here, many people do not realize that it is not limited to sexual love. Romance and showing affection are also involved in nurturing passionate love. Taking a romantic walk in the park, having dinner together alone, and sending a romantic note or flowers help to kindle the passionate and exciting feelings of love. While passionate feelings are a part of marital love, remember it is only one side of the triangle.

**How the Sides of the Triangle Work Together**

- **Commitment = Decision**
- **Intimacy = Friendship**
- **Passion = Excitement**

It is important for married couples to keep this triangle balanced in order to feel the love that they would like to experience. For example, if a couple doesn’t trust on the commitment level, both intimacy and passion will suffer greatly. It is very important for trust and friendship to be built first before the openness of the passionate side of the relationship can be experienced. Many engaged couple become engaged based solely on the passionate side of love without nurturing the intimate (friendship) and commitment sides of love.

Over the course of a marriage it is important to realize that the triangle periodically changes shape. For example, during a time when the husband is sick with the stomach flu, the commitment side of love must be the strongest. During this time the intimate side of love can be nurtured, while, the passionate side is put on hold for a time. This is necessary under the circumstances and will hopefully change as soon as the person’s health returns. However, it is important to see that when the passionate side is waning during that illness, that the other two sides, intimacy and commitment, must make up the balance. If a couple’s decision to marry is based on a shallow concept of love, when the feeling of loves wants the marriage itself can be in danger.

If the commitment side of love is weak, a couple has a serious crisis at hand because the intimate and passionate sides of love and still seeking to be fulfilled. In these cases, it is not uncommon for spouses to seek fulfillment elsewhere through fantasy or extramarital affairs. The commitment that a husband and wife has is the basis for intimacy and passion to grow. Each of the sides of the triangle relies on the other sides in order to give and receive love to the fullest.

The intimacy side of the triangle wanes at times as well. This occurs many times with overly busy schedules and/or the introduction of children into a marriage. Much of the time that couples spent focusing on their relationships (sharing thoughts and feelings) is disrupted because of the children and busy time schedules. It is important to see how the intimate side of marriage also affects the passionate side of the love triangle.
The passionate side is deeply connected to the intimate side of married love. It is important for couples to nurture the intimate side of their marriage. Couples must make sure that their relationship is one of their top priorities and set aside time to spend alone. In the way, the passionate side of love will be able to be maintained. It is predictable to see that when the intimate side of marriage is suffering that the passionate side also suffers. Couples finding themselves in the circumstances may find that sex becomes laborious or nonexistent. Next, let’s look at a diagram that shows how triangles one and two work together to form a Christian model of love.

**Triangle Three: A Christian Model of Love**

![Triangle Diagram]

After reviewing triangles one and two, you may notice that triangle three is a composite showing both triangles superimposed onto each other. Using this model a husband and wife who share a commitment to prove each other and who are growing together towards God, will be able to experience intimacy and passion for each other and for God. It is important for couples to monitor the shape of their triangles and to understand the transition phases that the triangles go through. In this way, a couple who sees a side of their triangle is suffering can seek to bolster it by building up other sides of their marriage and making sure that their individual relationships to God and being maintained.