

## Business is Booming at Christmas

Christmas and New Years is a great time of the year ... especially for marriage counselors and divorce attorneys. Historically, on January 2nd, divorce attorneys and marriage counselors alike are swamped with new business that will keep them busy until Spring. Christmas is a litmus test of a marriage's health. Healthy marriages flourish during the holidays, but Christmas is the straw that breaks the back of many unhealthy marriages.

The strength of a marriage is tested when decisions must be made. If a husband and wife have learned to discuss issues with respect for each other's perspectives while avoiding anger, disrespect or demands, Christmas activities and the accompanying decisions can draw them together and increase their love for each other. But in struggling marriages, conflicts are not resolved with mutual consideration. Instead, husbands and wives try to force decisions on each other without taking each other's feelings into account, or one spouse withdraws in "passive-aggression." The marriage becomes a battleground for control. That leads to a Christmas filled with resentment and unhappiness. The Bible speaks to issues of conflict in marriage and tells husbands and wives:

*And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* Ephesians 5:20 (NLT)

When you find ways to come to mutually acceptable terms on issues, like how much money to spend and which activities to participate in together, neither of you will be controlled by the other, because you are not being forced to do anything. You are simply being prevented from gaining at each other's expense. That's love and respect, not control. Here are four steps that you can follow with each decision you make about the way you will be celebrating Christmas.

- 1 Before beginning to "negotiate" pray together for God's guidance and for a spirit of mutual submission and humility.
- 2 Set ground rules to make negotiations pleasant and safe.
- 3 State what you both want and why you want it. Repeat back each other's position regarding a particular decision before you try to find resolution. Don't argue!
- 4 Brainstorm and brainstorm some more. Think of all sorts of ways to resolve the conflict, and don't correct each other when you hear of a plan that you don't like. Just write down every suggestion.
- 5 Pray for God's assistance and narrow the list to those solutions that are mutually satisfactory. Then select the one that you both like the most. If an impasse is reached, stop and come back to the issue later, using the time to pray and ask God to examine your hearts and reveal your motives. Then, if none of them still meet with your enthusiastic agreement, go back to step 4.

If you have found it impossible to establish health ways of conflict resolution in your marriage, don't ignore the problem! You may find it helpful to contact Cornerstone and ask about our Prayer Counseling and Marriage Mentoring programs. We're here to help!

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