

Dr. Greg Smalley Reveals How to Fight Your Way to a Better Marriage



By Jennifer Ross

Dr. Greg Smalley was fortunate to be raised in a loving family who believed in the sanctity of marriage. From a very young age, he attended marriage conferences held by his father, Dr. Gary Smalley. This foundation ultimately led to his own passion and to the marriage counselor and author that he is today. In his latest book *Fight Your Way to a Better Marriage: How Conflict Can Take You to Deeper Levels of Intimacy*, Dr. Smalley explains what it means for a relationship to benefit from the opportunities that fighting presents and how a marriage can succeed because of disagreement. We had the chance to interview Dr. Smalley and hear what he had to say about his upbringing and how it influenced his life.

When watching your father's conferences, what principles did he speak about that really struck a chord with you?

I think one thing that stuck with me was my father's passion for doing something that made a difference. And I never forgot that. Something else that I saw from my dad is that he was the same person at home as he was up on stage. He worked to implement the things that he was teaching.

He also taught us the concept of honor, the importance of viewing your wife, your kids, your loved ones, as priceless treasures. I want my heart in my marriage. I want my heart with my kids.

Let's talk about that concept of honor. Do you think that's the main principle that most adults are misunderstanding or misinterpreting in their marriages?

When we become comfortable with someone, it's easy to lose sight of honor. When we lose sight of someone's value, we are likely to treat them in hurtful ways. If I don't value myself, then it's pretty hard to value other people as well. If we just did those two things every day – cherish our loved ones and value them – then we would also be nourishing them. If that's all we did, can you imagine how strong our marriages

would be in this country? But again, it's hard to do that because we've got all this other stuff going on.

Can you briefly explain how fighting can improve a marriage? It sounds so counterintuitive.

The problem is that, culturally, we tend to perpetuate that myth that conflict is a bad thing. We see fighting as a sign that your marriage isn't that strong. There's amazing benefits if we are willing to walk through the doorway of conflict. Some of the greatest things that I've learned about my wife have happened on the other side of conflict.

I hate the words "conflict resolution," and I never use that term. Sometimes it's not about an issue to resolve. It's about how to manage the situation when we bump into a difference. Every relationship will have conflict. It's a normal part of life. So really, my book focuses on how to find success in these times of arguments.

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You state that fights are really about fear and not about money, kids, etc. If that's the case, then why do we focus so much of our energy on fighting about money or kids?

I think that's what we are taught to do. We see it on TV and in movies. Conflict is driven by something deeper than the surface level issue. I call it an emotional button. It's like an iceberg. The topic is what we see, so we spend all our time worrying about that. But man, there's a lot going on down deep, and that's the stuff that we have to learn how to handle. I need to learn what my buttons are because ultimately to break out of conflict, I've got to learn to deal with me first.

You talk about the unproductive fights between you and your wife. Considering the amount of experience you have with understanding marriages, how did you find yourself falling

into this common trap?

I have my bad days, and I'm no different than anybody else. I may know more things, but I'm still gonna get my buttons pushed. There's only two types of reactions: when we fight or when we flight. What this does is create a reactive cycle. My button gets pushed, and I react. The way I react pushes my wife's button, and she reacts, and we just keep spinning around. It's what we all do.

And finally, what is the one thing that you want readers to take away from your book?

What I like is the sequence for breaking this cycle; I show a very simple way to figure out how to solve things as a team. We're usually taught that we need to talk through our arguments – and that's really the worst advice you can give someone. It really does need to go in order. I gotta deal with me first, get my heart open, and then I can go after my spouse and care for her heart. Together, we can solve whatever needs to be solved.

You can purchase a copy of 'Fight Your Way to a Better Marriage' in bookstores and online nationwide beginning November 6, 2012. For more information about Dr. Smalley, you can visit his website at smallemarriage.com.