Fueling the Fire

Karen and John have been married for 25 years. They have gone through many struggles in their relationship including Karen’s depression and affair, John’s drinking, problems with their teenage kids, lack of forgiveness, and unresolved conflict. But the past two years have been better. Both of them have learned to react less intensely to each other. Both of them have forgiven each other and taken responsibility for their own weaknesses. Both of them have learned to resolve conflict. However, recently things have taken a different path. John lost his job and began to drink again. He was irritable and withdrawn and Karen felt abandoned and resentful. One night, she lost it and brought up old conflicts and resentments that she had let go. John then brought up his old resentments including her affair. Things rapidly deteriorated and they were right back to where they were years ago.

It isn’t unusual for people to revert to old patterns when things get stressful. It isn’t unusual for people to grow in their relationship skills and then have times when they slip back into old behavior. It isn’t unusual for old issues to resurface under pressure, but the fire has to be put out before it consumes too much. Both Karen and John have choices. They can choose to fuel the fire or put out the flames. If both of them fuel the fire, it will burn and destroy their relationship and the progress they have made. They will find themselves left with only ashes. When faced with a relationship situation where the other person is reverting back to old behavior, here are some of the things you need to remember:

❖ How you react and what you say can make things better or worse.

❖ Your new behavior changes the dynamic and will shorten the slip the other person is having; reacting in the old way will lengthen the slip.

❖ Regardless of what the other person says and does, you will feel better if you choose to use your words and actions to calm things down rather than stir them up even more.

Your actions will either fuel the fire or help to put it out.

By Karla Downing
**Relationship Prayer**

God,
Help me use my words to put out the fire rather than to fuel it when someone reverts back to “old” behavior.

**Relationship Challenge**

- When someone reverts back to old behavior, make a choice to use your words and actions to calm the situation rather than to inflame it.

**Scripture Meditation**

**James 3:1-12**

“Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can’t draw fresh water from a salty spring.” (New Living Translation)

If you have any questions you would like to ask Karla, please feel free to email her at karla@changemyrelationship.com.