



P R E
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A G E

MANUAL

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CHAPTER 1: COMMUNICATION

WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT COMMUNICATION?

Communication is not something new to us. After all, we've been communicating since we were in our mother's womb in one form or another!

We are often familiar with the ideas and theories about communication (e.g. communication styles, miscommunication etc.) but as an engaged couple we encourage you to be open to learn something new which is specific to your future marriage and your future partner.

Marriage is all about teamwork. Its ultimate goal is unity. Communication is the key to understanding each other and to build this unity and sense of team. The exciting thing is that the best time to build communication skills is when things are going well. This is one area of your married life that you can start working on now! The patterns you are creating now (as an engaged couple) are likely to play out in your marriage relationship. Things don't magically change when you get married so if, for example, you struggle to listen well now, then you are likely to struggle in that same area when you are married too.

So be intentional in establishing good, healthy patterns in your relationship now.

LET'S TOUCH ON 3 ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION ...

Listening

This is not just hearing someone, but listening to them in an effective, reflective way. Did you know that 98% of good communication is listening? Wow! No wonder this is often the most challenging part of communication for many couples. How often is this true: "What I say is not what you hear, and what you think you heard is not what I meant at all." Clarifying is another vital aspect of listening - making sure you have heard the other person well by reflecting back to them and clarifying your understanding. "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" James 1: 19.

Make sure you are not simply waiting to speak! Really aim to seek first to understand your partner before you aim to be understood. Identify what your blocks to effective listening are - perhaps it's defensiveness? Or pride? Or self-centredness?

Talking/ expressing

It is a real skill to be able to express oneself! To minimise misunderstanding you and your partner need to learn to verbalise as clearly as possible what is going on inside of you. Communication is not only what you say but, more importantly, what your partner understands by what you say.

Touch/ non-verbal communication

Words relay only 7% of the intended message so body language, facial expressions, loving gestures etc are vital. Physical touch is an incredibly powerful means of communicating.

TIPS FOR GREAT COMMUNICATION:

Watch out for:

- **Busyness** (a packed schedule often results in a lack of time for genuine, heartfelt communication)
- **Stress** (watch out for the effect on stress on your communication pattern – does it stop communication? Cause unbalanced communication? Create conflict?)
- **Different interests** (although this is good to keep a sense of personal identity, make sure your interests don't pull you apart and cause less communication.)
- **Familiarity** (when we're courting someone we can put a lot of effort in which disintegrates into laziness and familiarity in marriage)
- **Using silence as a manipulative tool.** Silence is a form of communication that is very powerful and very negative. Avoid this as much as possible.
- Become aware of **unhealthy patterns of behaviour** that commonly start arguments or block communication in your relationship. For example, you might be someone who tends to invalidate emotions, or someone who jumps in and offers solutions. Or you might realise that work stress is a major block to communicating openly with your spouse.

Acceptance (that is unconditional), authenticity (that is genuine and sincere) and empathy (really trying to put yourself in the other person's shoes) are key ingredients to being a good communicator. In many ways it's not about formulas. Who you are (your character and personal qualities) is more important than what you do (your skills). So even if you are a clumsy or awkward communicator, if you aim to show acceptance, authenticity and empathy, you will be laying a wonderful foundation for great communication.

Recognise that your words also have the potential to cut, hurt and wound Proverbs 12: 18 says, "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." We need to continually evaluate whether what we are saying is helpful or hurtful. Too often we speak quickly, without thought and say things we regret, don't mean and never intended to share. We need to learn to put a guard on our mouths! (We will look at this in greater detail when we talk about conflict)

Learn the communication style of your partner.

Is your partner an expounder (confident in sharing his/her own views, often insensitive to others, not great at listening)? Or a conformer (someone who only express ideas that are acceptable to those around them)? Does your partner retreat into a "cave" when you're trying to open up? Perhaps s/he uses humour to avoid certain topics? Maybe your partner is great at talking but not so good at listening? Consider their parents, and their family – how do these key role models communicate? What other influences come from their background or their education or their business experience? What other people have been good/ bad role models in their communication style?

Marriage is going to be an amazing journey of discovery as you learn these things - as you discover as a couple your patterns of communication, what works and what doesn't, when it's a good time for you to communicate and when it's not.

The key thing to remember is to learn your partner - not the generalisation/ stereotype/ ideal. You may read many books on the subject but you need to read your partner most of all. And then, a great challenge is that while you discover and learn all about your partner you need to accept the differences between you. Your goal is to love them unconditionally, not change them!

While we encourage you to accept and love your partner as s/he is, don't be soft on yourself! When you

become aware of these unhelpful patterns or behaviours, work hard at changing them IN YOURSELF.

Aim to communicate on all levels – emotional, mental/ intellectual, social and spiritual. Try and be balanced in your communication so that you are getting to know and love the WHOLE person that makes up your partner.

Become the very best communicator you can, develop your skills, hone your abilities. It is one of the greatest gifts you can give your spouse. Remember to say “I’m sorry” – apologise where necessary. “Forgive me” is an even more powerful and unifying thing to ask.

Commit to communicating consistently. We would recommend that you limit the amount of television you watch. Be intentional about this otherwise you will find yourselves sharing more couch time staring at a screen than face to face time communicating. We’d also highly recommend that you keep your TV out of your bedroom.

We love the idea of Date Night or Marriage Time.

This is a regular (weekly?) time that you set aside to be together and communicate.

Communication will not always be at a “deep and meaningful” level and that is ok. Be realistic in your expectations. A date night without a deep chat can still be fun, enjoyable and enriching for your marriage!

Some sources and recommended reading:

1. Love and Respect – Emerson Eggerichs
2. Always Better on the Big Screen (pre-marriage manual created by Carol Bester)
3. Mars and Venus Together Forever – John Gray.
4. The Marriage Go Round – Dennis and Tina Korte
5. Saving your marriage before it starts – Les and Leslie Parrot
6. Secrets to Lasting Love – Gary Smalley
7. Communication in your Marriage – Gary and Barbara Rosberg

EVALUATING OUR COMMUNICATION STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

EXERCISE 1

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

EXERCISE 2

ME

MY PARTNER

Never	Sometimes	Often	Criteria	Never	Sometimes	Often
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Verbally express love	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Listen sincerely and attentively	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Talk too much	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Discuss situations logically	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Share intimately	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Share goals and dreams	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Give non-sexual touches in communication	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Provide encouragement	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Address conflict appropriately	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Avoid addressing conflict	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Honestly express positive emotion	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10			Honestly express negative/difficult emotions	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		

EXERCISE 3

Spend some time filling in your answers below. Then share your responses with your partner. When it's your partner's turn to speak try and focus on REALLY listening to what they are saying.

Things I want you to know...

I want you to know the "thing" that first attracted me to you was...

I want you to know the "thing" that attracts me to you now is...

I want you to know I love it when we spend time...

I love it when you affirm me for...

I want you to know the thing I feel we need to work on in our relationship is....

I want you to know the thing I feel we do the best in this relationship...

One more thing I want you to know is...

EXERCISE 4:

LISTENING EXERCISE

(Taken from “The Marriage Course” – Nicky and Sila Lee)

Learning to listen is for some people as difficult as learning a foreign language, but we must learn in order to grow closer to our husband or wife.

Pay attention and do not interrupt

Allow your partner to finish what they are saying. Research indicates that the average individual listens for only 17 seconds before interrupting. Maintain eye contact and do not do something else at the same time.

Put yourself in your partner’s shoes

Put your own views to one side and really appreciate what it is like for your partner to be feeling the way that they do. This takes patience and compassion on the part of the listener. Do not ask a lot of questions. Try to tolerate silences.

Acknowledge their feelings

When you have listened to what your partner wants to say, reflect back what you heard without deflection or interpretation. It is important to try to summarise accurately the main facts but to reflect back the feelings in full. This helps your partner to know if you have understood. ‘Reflecting back’ may feel awkward, but it works!

Find out what is most important

Then ask your husband or wife: ‘What is the most important part of what you have been saying?’ Wait quietly while your partner thinks about what they want to say. When they have spoken, reflect back again what you have heard.

Help them determine what they might do

Now ask ‘Is there anything you would like me/us to do about what you have said?’ Again give your partner time to think quietly. When they have finished, reflect back what your partner has said, enabling them to hear their own decision. The listener then asks, ‘Is there anything more that you would like to say?’ If there is anything more, this should also be reflected back to the speaker.

Each of you picks an issue currently upsetting or bothering you that you have not previously discussed. At this point, choose an issue where there has not already been disagreement and conflict. It could be an area of concern related to work, holidays, your wedding day, your future etc.

- The speaker should hold an object (a pen/ wallet/ set of keys/ something similar). This is to remind you whose issue is being discussed.
- The speaker tells the listener about the issue and how they feel about it. The listener listens and then reflects back.
- Then the listener asks, ‘**What is the most important aspect of what you are saying?**’ The speaker responds. The listener listens and then reflects back again.
- The listener then asks, ‘**Is there anything you would like to do (or, if appropriate: like me/us to do) about what you have just said?**’ Again the listener listens and then reflects back.
- Finally, the listener asks, ‘**Is there anything more that you would like to say?**’

CHAPTER 2: GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

When building a house you might have a general idea of what you want but somehow you can't envisage it precisely. So you go to a specialist – an architect – to help you visualise your dream. Now there are many architects out there – some are great, some are not so great. And then there's the perfect one – the one who knows exactly what you need, exactly what you want and exactly what will add to and enrich your life.

And it's the same for marriage; culture, society and media – they all want to shape our views, expectations and perspectives of what marriage is. We also frequently have our own personal ideas and expectations of what we think marriage should be, or what we imagine a husband or wife should be like. This is often based on what we have seen modelled to us (through our parents or significant others).

However, if we want the perfect design for marriage (and who wouldn't?), then we should consult the original architect... God himself! The reason it is so vital to do this is because the mental picture or expectation we have is often what then becomes a reality in our lives. What God says and what He initially designed is not necessarily what and how we think. We need to suspend our assumptions. We need to get a new and better mind-set!

In Genesis we see marriage as part of the creation process – marriage is an ordinance of creation, not something created later by church or society. God created marriage. We see that marriage is one man + one woman; we see marriage is lifelong; and we see marriage is public.

Marriage is also a matter of grace and mercy – God provides Eve while Adam is asleep – she is a gift to him, totally unearned and undeserved! And Adam's response is to rejoice and be delighted in the gift!

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

Popular belief and culture have had a lot to say about marriage! Over time the purpose of marriage has been many things. Some would see its purpose as a way to improve the security and status of your family. Another popular brief is that the purpose of marriage is love or happiness. We are told that the aim of marriage is to be happy; so we choose someone who we think is going to make us happy. Modern people can also have a consumer attitude toward marriage. If this marriage is meant to make me happy, then the basic language of the heart goes like this: "I'll be the spouse I ought to be if and to the degree that you're the spouse you ought to be." The Bible, however, says that the purpose of marriage is gospel-re-enactment.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Think of the story of the gospel. To put it simply: God creates us and all is well for a while, but it isn't long before things begin to go pear-shaped. Jesus sees us stuck in our human condition; we are not close to the person he created us to be. So He acts – Jesus comes into our lives and lays Himself down in sacrificial love. As a result of that action we are now on a journey with Him to a future perfection, becoming who we were created to be.

So the purpose of marriage is to re-enact this gospel story. You are Jesus to your spouse. To the degree that you know and experience what Jesus has done for you, you are able to do it for someone else.

Most marriages go like this: at the start you fall in love, that's why you get married. You love the beauty of the person, there's something about the person that's attractive. Then at some point in your marriage your spouse lets you down. Disillusionment can set in because you'll find that the greatness that you loved in that person is more embryonic and undeveloped than you thought. And at that point you can either go the consumer way, which is to say, "Well, this person is not being the spouse he or she should be so I'm not going to be either". Or you can parallel the gospel - you act with the right mind-set. This means love is an action first and a feeling second. It is more about your spouse than it is about you. You are willing to lay your life down. Your attitude is "I will be the spouse I ought to be whether or not you are being the spouse you ought to be. Why? Because Jesus loved me like that. He loved me not because I was lovely but in order to make me lovely and I'm going to do that for you."

Effectively you are teaming with God to help your spouse become who she/he was created to be through sacrificial service "I'm going to bring my spouse to the full potential that God has given them. I want to participate in what God is trying to do in their lives".

A KEY PASSAGE FROM THE BIBLE:

Let's look at one of the key passages from the Bible which explores this topic of marriage:
(Please see chapter 10 for further commentary on these verses)

Ephesians 5

1 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

Instructions for Christian Households

21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

It's important to remember that what we are sharing here is God's picture - so it's meant to be done in context of a relationship with Him; we are doing this with Him. This chapter begins with a reference to the fact that we are "dearly loved children". So our first reference point is that of being a child of God. I am reminded to find my IDENTITY and SECURITY in God first.

We tend to put our spouse at the centre of our significance and security. If we do this it can create all kinds of unhealthy and unrealistic expectations and demands on our partner. We can even idealise our partner as we see them as the centre of everything. BUT if you're going to have a really great marriage, Jesus has to demote your spouse.

Your spouse cannot be the main reason why you feel any kind of sense of worth and happiness. Otherwise when your spouse is having a problem you'll just be paralysed, when your spouse is not giving you what you need you'll feel unsatisfied and give up.

Also, if I'm putting Jesus at the centre then I have the resource of GRACE available to make it happen – working in me and through me. Grace flows to me from God, and grace flows through me towards my partner. I don't have to try and do it on my own. (This is great, because sometimes it's hard!) I rely heavily on God's grace – He's the one at work in me and through me. It's not about my self-effort and my self-improvement – on my own I will never be all I am meant to be. Additionally, I get to be a channel of God's grace to my partner, who is also a child of God. And so that determines the way I treat him or her.

SO WHAT IS GOD CALLING US TO?

In looking at this passage we can identify some examples of core characteristics that all Christ followers are asked to demonstrate (the Bible is full of these kinds of instructions). These can also be applied in marriage.

Things like:

- Walk in the way of **love** (v.1) - we are called to love our spouses
- Live as children of **light** (v.8) - characteristics like goodness, righteousness and truth should abound in our marriages. There is light and goodness - we are good to each other, we are good for each other, we speak and act truthfully.
- **Mutual submission** (v.21) - we submit to one another and honour and respect one another.

- But we can also extract three ingredients that apply specifically to both husband and wife:
- **Selflessness** - putting the other person first
- **Unconditional, covenantal love** - it's not contractual; there is commitment, covenant and promise
- **Oneness and unity** - what I do and say promotes our partnership, the idea that we are a team, we are united

When dating or living together, you have to prove your value daily by impressing and enticing. You have to show that the chemistry is there and the relationship is fun and fulfilling or it will be over. We are still basically in a consumer relationship, and that means constant promotion and marketing. The legal bond of marriage, however, creates a space of security where we can open up and reveal our true selves. We can be vulnerable, no longer having to keep up facades. We don't have to keep selling ourselves... To be loved but not known is comforting, but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is... what we need more than anything." (The Meaning of Marriage - Tim Keller)

WE'RE UNIQUE AND DIFFERENT

The Bible is clear that Adam and Eve were created equal in God's sight. In our chauvinistic culture in which women are often belittled and abused, this fact needs to be clearly stated. God made women totally equal to men in personhood, dignity, and worth. They are no less important or valuable to God. But within the context of their equality, God assigned men and women different roles. He made Adam first, signifying his unique role, as leader and initiator. He created Eve from Adam and brought her to Adam to be his helper in the tasks God had assigned him. She was made to complement, nourish and help her husband.

God didn't make us to duplicate each other, but to complement each other. The point is not that Adam was better than Eve, just as God the Father is not "better" than God the Son. Father and Son are equal in essence, power, glory, and worth, but they have different roles; and the Son joyfully submits to the Father's will. (For example in Luke 22:42 the night before Jesus is crucified he says, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.")

LET'S FOCUS ON THE WOMAN'S ROLE:

In Genesis 2: 18 "The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

What does this word "Helper" mean?:

The word "helper" in the Bible (Hebrew: "ezer") that is used of Eve in Genesis, is most often used of God, God our help. It's important to note that a helper can only help out of strength. A helper helps because he or she has qualities that are needed by the person who doesn't have those qualities so it's a position of strength; it's not like an assistant or a subordinate. A wife helps out of complementary strengths that the husband doesn't have.

Now let's focus on the TWO further specific instructions that God gives to the wife in Ephesians 5:

Willing submission

Note that submission is willing/ voluntary. Hopefully we've made it clear that this is respectful submission and it's between equals. Submission is something that a wife gives; it's not something a husband can demand. Because submission is willing there is joyfulness to it. Attitude is vital – it is a "want to" attitude not a "have to". I'm an active participant in the marriage. Consider this definition: to be submissive means to co-operate voluntarily with someone else out of love and respect for God and that person.

We take on the role of Jesus - Jesus as the son who willingly submitted to the Father. Our example is Christ and Jesus revolutionises the role of submission because He shows us willing submission, it's not begrudging.

In Hebrews 10: 7 it says "Here I am, I delight to do your will oh God." And in the book of Philippians we are told that Jesus will be exalted because He didn't hold on to His status or role; He became a servant.

There's been a lot of negative press around this issue of submission. But we need to remind ourselves that it's not going to hurt us if it's defined by Jesus rather than by a cultural understanding.

"If it's not an assault on the dignity and value and equality of Jesus, the second person in the Great I Am, to take the subordinate role to His Father in order to accomplish our salvation, how on earth can I be hurt or devalued when asked to play the Jesus role of subordination in my marriage?" (Kathy Keller)

Respect

Wives are instructed to respect their husbands so that they feel valued, admired and honoured. God knew that this was an important need for a man so he helps us by giving us a clear way to fulfil this need. Remember wives tend to find it easy to love so we are not specifically commanded to do so. We tend to find it less easy to respect so God commands us to do this. For a man love = respect.

One of the best ways to love a husband is to show him respect in ways that are meaningful to him. Study your husband – learn what you can do and say to show him respect in a way that is meaningful to him.

Wives ask yourself "What can I do and what can I say that communicates respect to my husband?"

AND NOW LET'S CONSIDER THE MAN'S ROLE:

Other than the common ingredients, men are also called to do three other specific things:

Be a servant leader

Our example in this is Christ and the way He lived. He was selfless and unconditional in his love for his church. He literally laid down His life for her. What an example! What a challenge! Men, be aware not to focus on the word lead without seeing the word serve in front of it. Our aim is not domination, power or control. It is serving the other person – in this case our wives – in the big and the small things.

Love

A woman's primary need is to feel cherished, valued and captivating. So God puts this reminder in to get husbands to remember to work towards fulfilling that need.

Bring out the best in your wife

Make her shine! Do all you can to cause her to thrive and blossom. Because of you and your role in her life, she should be more than she could ever be on her own. God's picture for marriage is beautiful and amazing – but it does set a high standard. It's no wonder that Song of Solomon repeatedly tells us "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" or as The Message paraphrases it: "Don't excite love, don't stir it up, until the time is ripe and you're ready."

So we should keep that picture of marriage in mind in our relationships right now. It's the architect's ideal design, the way it was created to work.

Maybe it's helpful to do a bit of a self-audit right now and ask ourselves the following questions...

FOR THE GUYS:

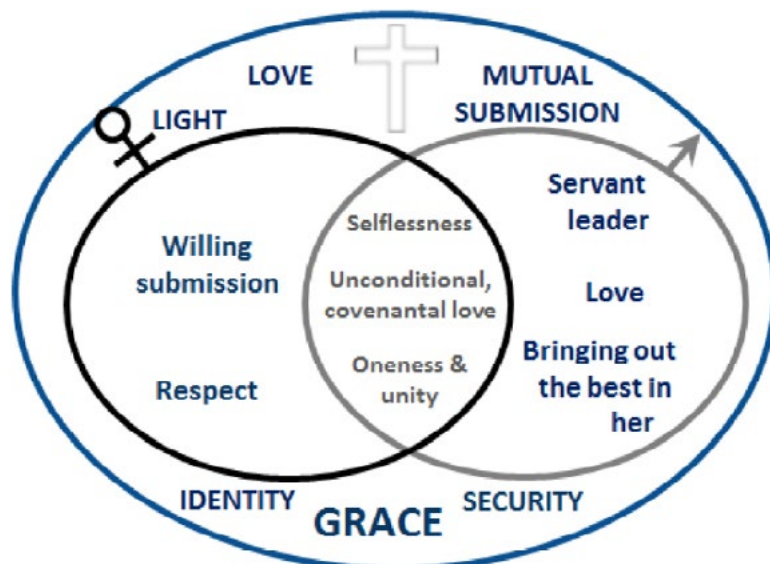
- Is my partner a woman I can love and cherish?
- Can I show unconditional love towards her and lead her in a way that is biblical, loving and seeks to bring out the best in her?
- How am I leading her at the moment?
- Is my leadership style a reflection of high integrity?
- Is it characterised by a servant attitude?
- Do I regularly show love for my partner with sacrificial acts?
- Do I demonstrate love even when I don't feel it?
- Does my partner feel as if I am aware of her needs?
- Does my partner know that she is a big part of my life?
- How am I doing in serving my partner at the moment?

FOR THE GIRLS:

- Is my partner a man I can respect, admire, esteem and value?
- In our relationship right now how am I showing him that respect by my words and my actions?
- Does my attitude reflect respect for my partner?
- Do I concentrate enough on my partner's needs?
- Am I a positive encouragement to my partner?
- Do I accept my partner regardless of his performance?

A HELPFUL PICTURE:

Our tendency is to highlight one or two of these ingredients (particularly maybe the ones that have been more controversial). But God is calling us to ALL of them. And as women, we should focus on what He has called women to – not what He has called our men to (and vice versa). Think of a trampoline held to its frame by springs. If all the springs are in their correct place and in good condition the trampoline has a healthy bounce. But when we neglect a spring, or focus only on a few of them, they can start to rust and perish and the bounce of the trampoline – its effectiveness - is undermined. Pray that God would enable you to focus on all the Godly ingredients that he has emphasised so that your marriage is healthy and full of bounce.



SOME SOURCES AND RECOMMENDED READING:

1. The Meaning of Marriage - Tim and Cathy Keller
2. Listen to a great talk on marriage by Tim and Cathy Keller. Find it here: <http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/cultivating-healthy-marriage> (much of the content of this talk was based on the excellent content we found here!)
3. Love and Respect – Emerson Eggerichs
4. Visit the Common Ground Church website for a number of talks on the topic of marriage www.commongroundchurch.co.za

EXERCISE 1

GOD’S PICTURE FOR MARRIAGE

Both our roles	How I see myself	How I see my partner
Unconditional, covenantal love	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞
Selflessness	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞
Oneness/ Unity	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞
Mutual honour	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞
Mutual respect	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞
Mutual submission	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞
Wife’s role	Wife to answer	Husband to answer
Willing submission	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞
Respect	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞
Husband’s role	Husband to answer	Wife to answer
Servant leader	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞
Love	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞
Bring out the best in her	😊 😐 😞	😊 😐 😞

EXERCISE 1 CONTINUED...

FOR THE WIFE TO ANSWER:

What things does your partner do to make submission difficult?

What things does your partner do to make submission a joy?

FOR THE HUSBAND TO ANSWER:

What does your wife do to make leading her difficult?

What does your wife do to make leading her a joy?

“Marriage is like a dance. The man doesn’t force, demand or drag. He simply invites the woman to move with him. He himself moves with the music - as she does. The music is the rhythm of God’s grace and direction. In this sense, he follows before he leads. And she follows because she wants to. She does not lean on him in clinginess - her weight is still over her own feet. She moves with him, in partnership, but not in subservience. She respects and trusts him enough to submit herself to his lead. And though he sets the direction, he opens up the possibility for her expression. She adds colour and surprise twirls to the dance. Though he leads she is free to alert him graciously to the possibility of a new movement- and the man is able to respond to her suggestion with grace. If he stifles her, the dance will not flourish. If she steals the lead, synergy is quelled. But when a man and a woman know their roles and operate to their best within their framework, magic is created. The dance becomes more than leadership and followship... It is beautiful rhythm and harmony.”

CHAPTER 3:

MYTHS, DESIRES & EXPECTATIONS

“The key to a great marriage: Put the other person first! Or as the bible says, “Wives; honour your husband’s leadership. Husbands; serve and love your wives selflessly, laying down your very lives for your wives.”

For most of us, this is a period of entering into marriage for the first time. Unfortunately, we all go into marriage believing certain ‘myths’, which we’ve picked up from popular media, or carry a certain level of expectations as to what marriage will look and be like.

In this next section, we want to dispel some myths, distinguish between real and perceived needs, and talk about our expectations of marriage.

EXPECTATIONS

We will first look at expectations, as both myths and needs fall under the umbrella of expectations.

Let’s begin by looking at the place you are in right now:

You are about to get married and you are full of dreams and desires; dreams for your lives, and your lives together, dreams for your family and your future. These dreams and desires are often God-given and they’re good and they’re wholesome. Some dreams and desires may be based on the following things:

- To have a nice house
- To own your business
- To have a stay-at-home-wife, who can take care of the kids and the house.
- To have a husband who will provide sufficiently.
- To travel overseas for holidays

Unfortunately, desires can often be shaped and influenced by ‘unreality’ – Hollywood, the media, and the Internet. It is normal and to be expected that you have desires and dreams. But let’s look at the subject of most of those dreams.

Before marriage, as a single person, your life often revolves around I. It’s really all about me. I can do what I want, when I want, how I want, where I want. As a single – I do what I want; I fulfill my desires and I work towards my dreams. This is not necessarily in a selfish manner but a reality of not necessarily having another person to consider.

Looking back at the desires listed above, we see that they all have a big “I” in the middle of them. We need to realise that to some degree, we all walk down the aisle with a box of desires. The danger comes in, however, where these healthy, God-given, legitimate desires very quickly shift into another category. These good desires become expectations. The more entrenched the “I” is in your desires, the more easily desires become expectations and the more significant, weighty and substantial these expectations become.

For example: My desire to have a big house, can quickly become an expectation that one I will have, and deserve to have, a big house. Or one's desire to travel overseas can quickly become an expectation that one day we will travel overseas often.

Marriage involves two individuals coming together, and therefore potentially two big "I's" colliding.

Four possible things can happen, when these expectations surface in marriage:

1. You can fight it constantly: "I want it this way... it must be done my way"
2. You put up with the others expectations. In this case, one person usually overcomes, and the other feels overcome. In this case, the unrealistic 'peace' won't last and sooner or later things will begin to unravel.
3. You can give up and get out. You can leave your spouse and take your box of expectations and try to find someone else who will meet them.
4. You can compromise: "I will do what you ask/want if you do what I ask/want."

This topic being discussed is one of the most common causes of issues and conflict in marriage. It is also so often the most difficult to put your finger on and therefore deal with. This is why it is so important to recognise danger areas now, before entering marriage.

The biggest danger and problem with these unhelpful expectations is that it leads to a debt/debtor relationship, whereby one person feels like the other person owes them.

Let's look at some examples:

While the husband is at work, the wife cleans the house:

- If a husband *desires* that his wife will clean the house whilst he is at work, this situation will lead to gratitude and appreciation
- If a husband *expects* that his wife will clean the house whilst he is at work, this situation will lead to a lack of acknowledgement where no credit is given.

Expectations make the other person indebted to reach the expectations, and when they do so, they are at a 'break-even' point. You therefore never feel gratitude and appreciation because, well, they were just doing what is expected of them.

What is the result of all this?

It squeezes out romance, intimacy and unconditional love in marriages.

This is how you know if your legitimate desires are in fact illegitimate expectations.

Your relationship will lack:

- Expressions of gratitude
- Acts of service

So here is our advice to you: **Build your marriage around fulfilling the dreams and desires of your spouse rather than expecting your spouse to fulfill your desires.**

How?

1. Realize that your marriage is an unconditional covenant. It's not based on whether your spouse fulfills your expectations or not. It is not conditional upon anything else: It is an unconditional covenant.
2. Remove the "I" from the centre of your life: It's not all about you and your desires and expectations. Keep your desires in the 'desires' box and when they come to be, you'll be blessed, you'll appreciate your spouse, you'll feel loved and appreciated.

EXERCISE 1:

As a couple, spend some time chatting through these discussion questions which will help identify & clarify expectations:

1. When you are sick, how much sympathy will you require? How would you expect your spouse to take care of you?

2. How much time do you expect to spend with your friends after you are married?

3. How will you relate to opposite sex friends once you are married? Will it be acceptable to phone, sms or meet alone?

4. Where do you want to live? (City, suburb) Do you want to live in a flat or house?

5. How important are family mealtimes to you? Do you want to sit at the table or in front of the TV?

6. How often would you like to eat out?

7. What is your understanding of "cleaning the house." Be specific.

8. Do you want children, and if so, when and how many?

9. What would you do if you cannot conceive children of your own?

10. How involved should a father be in the upbringing of his children? Be specific about your expectations, for e.g. He should bath the children every night, etc.

Negative expectations are a disbelief in the possibility of the good things of marriage. These are often stereotyped in the media and also come from negative experiences from the past. Here are some examples:

- 1. You expect your wife to nag you all the time:** You have disbelief about the possibility having great communication and patience.
- 2. You have an expectation that your husband won't have enough time for you:** You have disbelief about the generosity and the selflessness of your husband.

Maybe your family background wasn't great and your parents were not a great example of marriage. Rather than carrying that expectation into your marriage, carry the desire that your marriage/husband/wife will be great and take it upon yourself to work towards that.

NEEDS

Sometimes you feel like you have a specific need. There is a desire, which you have, which you feel you need to satisfy. Some needs are legitimate and some needs are not.

***For example:** You might feel like you need to go to every rugby match in town, every weekend, because that's your stress-reliever.*

All needs are based upon expectations. You expect that this is a realistic desire. We all think our needs are legitimate, but many of them are actually not true needs, but selfish expectations or false needs. We need to be able to identify between a legitimate need and a selfish expectation. Not only do you need to know what your needs are, but also what are your spouse's needs. When "I" is at the centre of your life – your desires become 'needs' in your eyes. But when you're committed to a self-less, unconditional marriage – you put the marriage above your own needs. No 'need' is greater than the health and good of your marriage.

Later on in the course we will speak about love languages: and how everyone has a need to be loved in a way which speaks to them.

Which of these are legitimate needs?

- Boys / Girls night out
- Sports involvement
- Time with family / parents
- Personal time / reading
- Work / study commitments
- Together time / date night time / marriage time
- God time
- Sex

In some ways it is good to let your spouse do things, which invigorate and excite them. At the same time, the spouse can't always use that line, "I need this" when they're actually just being selfish.

True needs are things that will build up the marriage and be good for the marriage, rather than just satisfy your own selfish desires.

MYTHS

We want to dispel 5 myths that many people have concerning marriage.

1. We will both expect exactly the same things from marriage
2. Everything good in our relationship will get better &
3. Everything bad in my life will disappear
4. My spouse will make me whole
5. I will change him/her after we are married

1. WE WILL BOTH EXPECT EXACTLY THE SAME THINGS FROM MARRIAGE

We all go into marriage with expectations; such as unspoken rules as to how things ought to be; or unconscious roles that we assume each partner will play.

Unspoken rules: You expect that the way that you have always done things is the same way that everyone does them, especially your spouse. We also expect that our spouses will know how we've done things, but that isn't always the case.

We find that when two colliding rules come together, there is a paradox, and it requires talking through that paradox, in order to come to a new conclusion.

Every family has unspoken rules that exist, and these will very soon be discovered as you enter into marriage. This is not a problem and it shouldn't be an area of concern.

More importantly however, is what your attitude is towards it. How do you handle these differences? Do you insist your way is right and that your spouse **MUST** do things your way?

Let's look at an example:

If one of you spills some liquid on the floor, what do you clean it up with? One person may expect that you use a cloth, which has been specifically assigned to cleaning things of the floor; while the other person might assume that the closest cloth will do. Both of these are unspoken rules, which each partner brings into marriage. As long as they are not spoken about there is room for misunderstanding and conflict.

Very often, the older you are and the longer you have lived out of your parents' home, the more entrenched the rules are. Marriage is a great opportunity to freshly create new rules for you as a couple.

Unconscious roles: These are the expectations that you have of who plays which role in the marriage.

- Who will do the gardening?
- Who will do the cooking, primarily?
- Who is expected to be the primary breadwinner?
- Who will plan holidays?

Your family and background often play a significant role in shaping your expectations. Different seasons of life will call for different roles and needs by each spouse. You need to be open and flexible to read the season.

EXERCISE 2:

COMPLETE THE TABLE 'MAKING YOUR ROLES CONSCIOUS'

Listed below are a number of chores or life tasks that will need to be handled by you or your partner. To make your unconscious understanding of roles conscious, first indicate how your parents handled these tasks (simply put a tick in the appropriate column). Then write down how you would like to divide up the tasks, according to your understanding of your own and your partner's interest, time, and abilities. Put your final decision of who will do what in the last column, and be prepared to renegotiate when your circumstances change.

	YOUR MOTHER	YOUR FATHER	BOTH PARENTS	YOU	YOUR PARTNER	BOTH OF YOU	FINAL DECISION
PROVIDING INCOME							
STAYING HOME WITH CHILDREN							
HANDLING FINANCES							
GARDEN WORK							
CAR MAINTENANCE							
LAUNDRY							
DISHES							
CLEANING							
COOKING AND BAKING							
GROCERY SHOPPING							
CARING FOR PET/S							
SCHEDULING SOCIAL EVENTS							
MAINTAINING TIES WITH FRIENDS & RELATIVES							
PLANNING VACATIONS							
INITIATING SEX							
DECORATING THE HOUSE							
MAKING MAJOR DECISIONS							
INITIATING DISCUSSIONS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP							
KEEPING THE HOUSE NEAT & TIDY							
DISCIPLINING THE CHILDREN							

Note:

Some of these tasks (such as disciplining children or initiating sex) should definitely be shared in order for the couple to have a strong relationship, but in reality many of these tasks may fall disproportionately to the husband or the wife because of unspoken assumptions or circumstances. Use this list periodically to discuss how you are doing.

2. EVERYTHING GOOD IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WILL GET BETTER & 3. EVERYTHING BAD IN MY LIFE WILL DISAPPEAR

You need to work on good things and you need to be proactive about making time for these good things. They often don't just happen automatically. Be proactive about creating space for those good things to develop – this will require time and effort.

Marriage and love are different to teenage romance and Hollywood romance. It is far better!! And it is very different. You live the same life as you did before you were married, with the same challenges and the same highs and lows. The only difference is that you are now sharing all of it with your best friend.

Here's a great surprise: Life together as a married couple is so normal and so natural. It isn't a massive change; life continues, but you just have your best friend by your side every day.

A great caution: It is easy to get lazy after a while, once you are in the rhythm of marriage. Many people begin to take it for granted and become selfish, living for themselves. You need to keep proactively working on the good things, and keep working on eliminating things that aren't great.

4. MY SPOUSE WILL MAKE ME WHOLE

You are setting yourself up to be disappointed because no human was designed to fulfill that task. It is impossible: You are putting an unattainable expectation on your spouse. In many ways that myth can be true, as your marriage partner should and will add something to you and your life, which you don't have, but he/she cannot make you a whole person. In marriage, two halves coming together don't make a whole.

Your spouse will complement your wholeness, but not complete you. You need to be whole in order to constantly give love, and attention, rather than just draw upon love and attention.

Think of your relationship as an emotional bank account; with debits and credits. If all you're doing is drawing on that emotional account to make you feel whole and complete as a person – your relationship is going to end up emotionally bankrupt, because your partner won't be able to invest as much as you're drawing out. You need to be contributing and adding to your relationship – which you can only do – if you're whole, mature and complete going into marriage already. Only the life-transforming power of Christ can make you whole. "Marriage challenges us to new heights and calls us to be the best person possible, but neither marriage nor our partner will magically make us whole."

5. I WILL CHANGE HIM/HER AFTER WE ARE MARRIED

This is straightforward. If anything, after the wedding day, it is easier to get lazy and to not be as selfless as before. If your spouse is selfish and lazy before you are married or if there are other ways and characteristics of your spouse which don't please you, there is great chance that those things will come out even more so after marriage. When you're frustrated with your spouse – rather saying 'oh God can't you change him / her' – rather pray 'oh God, come and change my selfish and impatient heart'.

Marriage is one of God's great instruments to make us humble, patient and more selfless. Rather be humble and willing to change yourself and let your kindness and graciousness, lead your spouse to change as well.

It is not your role to change this person; that is God's role. Your role is to love and serve and build up your partner; and the best way to do that is to pray for him/her.

So there we have it: 5 myths which most people carry into their marriage.

TO END OFF:

HERE ARE 5 THINGS THAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM MARRIAGE:

1. If you give yourself selflessly to your spouse, you're building towards a great marriage
2. If you put God at the centre, you'll have a fruitful marriage
3. If you trust God, He won't let you down.
4. If you commit to spending quality time together, your friendship will constantly deepen
5. If you're open to God's working in your life, you'll love the adventure of marriage.

ADDITIONAL EXERCISES FOR YOUR OWN TIME...

EXERCISE 3:

FROM IDEALISING TO REALISING YOUR PARTNER

This exercise is designed to help you relinquish unrealistic ideals you might hold of your partner and to discover his / her true character. Begin by ranking on a one-to-seven scale how much the following traits describe you and your partner. Complete the first two columns ("Your Ranking of You" and then "Your Ranking of Your Partner"). Don't worry about the other two columns just yet.

YOUR RANKING OF YOU		YOUR RANKING OF YOUR PARTNER	YOUR ACTUAL PARTNER'S RANK	THE DIFFERENCE
	COMPASSIONATE			
	PATIENT			
	SECURE			
	NURTURING			
	INSIGHTFUL			
	CONFIDENT			
	RELAXED			
	TENDER			
	EVEN-TEMPERED			
	HONEST			
	HEALTHY			
	SPIRITUAL			
	CONSISTENT			

Once you have ranked the first two columns, share your rankings with each other and write them on your own page. Then subtract your partner's actual ranking of himself / herself from your ranking of him / her. Note any significant differences and discuss them.

One of the central tasks of the early marriage years is to move from "idealising" your husband / wife to "realising" your husband / wife.

How accurate is your image of who your partner is compared to who he / she really is? The more accurately you can present yourselves to each other, the easier your first years of marriage will be.

EXERCISE 4: IMPORTANT ISSUES TO DISCUSS

1. How important is "loving yourself" when it comes to loving your spouse? Is there a connection?
2. Make a list of the reasons why you want to get married. Be honest.
3. Write a pro/con list about your partner and your relationship.
4. What role did God play in your decision to get married? Have you prayed about this, individually and as a couple? Have you made a good choice or a God choice?
5. Why do you think you are ready for marriage?
6. Does your partner bring out the best or the worst in you? Explain.
7. Does your partner draw you closer to God? Are you spiritually on the same level?
8. What are the goals you share for your marriage? Be specific.
 - 3 Months:
 - 6 Months:
 - 1 Year:
9. What are the obstacles that could prevent you from reaching these goals?
10. How do you feel about marriage counselling?
11. How do you plan on developing your spiritual relationship as a couple?

CHAPTER 4:

LEAVING AND CLEAVING

A verse you may often have heard at weddings or read in books regarding marriage comes from the first book of the Bible – Genesis:

Genesis 2:24

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

There are 3 helpful concepts contained in this verse:

To **Leave** to leave behind, separate from, give up dependence on, relinquish all attachments and let go

To **Cleave** to be united or joined to, to bind together (like super glue)

To **Weave** single new identity/entity/family

Marriage is about two people joining their lives together, and forming a new entity. The Bible talks about two becoming one, and describes the new relationship graphically as a “one flesh” relationship.

Marriage provides the ultimate in love, safety and security. It is designed to make us feel infinitely special and loved, to bring joy and completeness to our lives. But nothing worth having in life ever comes without cost or effort, and marriage is no different. This process of taking two independent people and weaving them into a beautiful new one flesh relationship is what the Bible calls cleaving – a process of becoming bound together irrevocably, unified and indistinct. But in order to cleave well, we first need to leave well.

LEAVING

In order to build a good marriage there are people and things which we need to leave behind or separate ourselves from. Our partner should have no rivals or threats and must be our priority. Therefore we must distance ourselves (within reason) from those people and/or things (such as parents, friends, hobbies or careers) on whom we have been depending to meet a need in our lives and, instead, look to our spouse to be the primary source (after God) of meeting that need. There are multiple areas in which we need to consciously and intentionally leave:

- Physical : Moving into a home together, creating your ‘own space’
- Emotional: People other than your spouse are no longer your primary source of affirmation or advice
- Financial: Where possible, gain financial independence/control
- Social: Less time with family/friends/ more time with spouse
- Spiritual: take responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of your family

For most of us, our families (particularly parents) have been the people of greatest influence in our lives thus far. They have played a very large role in shaping who we are, what we believe, how we think and behave - in ways that we may be aware of and in ways that we may not. Loyalty to one’s family is deeply ingrained and as a result “leaving” the family, departing from the way things have always been done in one’s family of origin and learning to relate to a new family are areas in which there exists potential for pain and conflict.

EXERCISE 1

The exercise below helps to identify those areas where leaving may be slightly more challenging and which may be areas of potential conflict...

HOW DEPENDENT ARE YOU AND YOUR PARTNER ON YOUR PARENTS?

Rank each item listed below from 1 – 5 (1 = no dependence on parents; 5 = high dependence on parents)

	MYSELF					MY PARTNER				
FINANCES	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
SOCIAL DEPENDENCE	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCE	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
SOURCE OF ADVICE/WISDOM	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
NEED FOR ACCEPTANCE	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
NEED FOR ENCOURAGEMENT	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

TIPS ON LEAVING WELL

Identify family patterns

“[The] Root of most problems in marriage is differences in upbringing. Each family has its own values, traditions, routines. Everything is deeply ingrained in a unique family blueprint, and when those of our spouse’s are different to what we’re used to, we need to work at it!” (Taken from the BBC website)

Most of us have a sense of “the way things should be done” – sometimes we only become aware of this when someone does things differently to the way we would do them! - which is probably a result of the way things have been done in our families of origin. It is helpful to discuss some of the following with one’s partner:

- Traditions (e.g. Christmas/birthday celebrations)
- Roles (who did what)
- Values (e.g. education/holidays/attitudes to money)
- Behaviours – both positive and negative (e.g. shouting when angry / complimenting frequently)
- Routines (e.g. washing up before going to bed)

This will help identify family patterns and help us as couples to decide what we would like to carry forward into our marriages and which we would like to work at leaving behind.

EXERCISE 2

TAKE SOME TIME TO CONSIDER HOW THINGS ARE DONE IN YOUR FAMILY OF ORIGIN:

ROUTINES AND TRADITIONS

WHO FILLED WHICH ROLES

VALUES

PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR

Recognise the role of issues from the past

We also need to recognise the impact of issues from the past and their potential to influence our behaviour and attitudes towards our spouse and/or in-laws. This may be a traumatic past which we are struggling to come to terms with or, more commonly, issues of unresolved pain or anger (e.g. unresolved anger around a mother you perceived as controlling may emerge as over reaction to your spouse trying to organise a holiday or your social calendar).

Leaving is not isolating ourselves

It is important to understand that leaving is not isolating ourselves or cutting ourselves off – it is realigning our priorities/loyalties. Our parents and families can be an amazing source of support and wisdom so when it comes to relating to parents and in-laws, we need to understand and work out for ourselves the balance between honouring our parents (good) and being controlled or manipulated by them (not so good!).

Exodus 20:12

Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

Just as you are adjusting to life as a married couple, your parents are adjusting to their new role/

relationship with you. It would be unreasonable to expect parents to relinquish any interest in their child's life simply because he/she is now married.

Remember that parents usually do have our best interests at heart – when they offer unsolicited advice or criticism or when they interfere inappropriately, they are generally just trying to help.

Leaving is a continual process

Leaving is something which needs to be continually worked at. Events such as buying property, having kids or the death of a parent/in-law can often lead to the “leaving” issues needing to be re-visited.

EXERCISE 3

1. What differences and similarities from Exercise 2 do you see in your lifestyle, goals and values when compared to each of your two families?
2. Discuss some of the things you'd like to carry forward into your marriage and which you would like to work at leaving behind

CLEAVING AND BECOMING ONE FLESH

Cleaving is a process of becoming physically, emotionally and spiritually one. It is not just a once off occurrence on your wedding day but both a continual process and an irrevocable bond.

Matt 19:6

Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.

God views a married couple as “one,” but day to day oneness is a process.

SOME TIPS ON CREATING AND SUSTAINING ONENESS

Have a vision for your marriage

Decide on what is important to you as a couple. You will have a different set of priorities and values to your parents, siblings and friends. Don't allow them to sabotage what's important to you, e.g. how you spend your time and money, how you discipline your children, your choice of leisure activities etc.

Present a united front

- Where possible, discuss issues and potential issues with your partner first
- Avoid criticism of your spouse to family AND by family
- Avoid discussing disagreements you are having/have had with parents

Make your own decisions

- When asking for advice/wisdom make it clear that you are not asking them to make the decision for you
- Know the difference between suggestion and manipulation (PJ Smythe). A suggestion allows the receiver to decide what to do, whereas manipulation requires a certain response.
- Identify what family customs/traditions you want to keep and decide for yourselves on new ones you would like to establish

Set boundaries

- Keeping in touch (how often will you phone/visit; how much detail around your lives will be shared)
- Privacy (what are the issues that may/may not be mentioned and/or discussed with others)
- Communicate boundaries to parents, especially when they've been crossed!

Tips for healthy in-law relationships

[Taken from "The Marriage Book" by Nicky and Sila Lee]

- Be reasonable about wedding arrangements
- Show your appreciation
- Stay in touch
- Resolve conflict
- Consider their needs and feelings (e.g. their sense of loss)
- Value the extended family
- Try to understand each other (e.g. be aware of their love languages)

SOURCES

We do not take credit for the content of this session! Our thinking in the area of leaving and cleaving has been shaped by many people and a variety of books. It is hard to pinpoint exactly which material comes from where but we would particularly like to acknowledge the following sources:

1. The Marriage Book by Nicky and Sila Lee
2. Always Better on the Big Screen (pre-marriage manual created by Carol Bester)
3. Getting Ready for marriage – P.J Smyth – a resource available on the God First website.

OTHER TOPICS TO DISCUSS:

1. Share with your partner one thing that you're looking forward to about joining their family, and one thing you fear.
2. Are there any issues you feel you and your partner should not discuss with family?
3. Is there anyone you would feel comfortable for your partner to discuss your disagreements with? Under what circumstances? And with what conditions attached?
4. How much time do you anticipate spending with your parents once you are married?
5. Where will you spend your first Christmas as a married couple? Consider how to communicate this to the extended family.
6. Would you consider borrowing money from either set of parents? Why or why not?
7. What have you done in the last month to show appreciation to your parents? What can you do or would you like to do to express appreciation in the run up to the wedding?

ROLE PLAY TOGETHER:

- The phone rings just after you and your partner have had a fight. It is your mother and she can hear you have been crying. What do you say?
- Your parents come for dinner and whilst you and your mum wash up the dishes, your partner reads the paper/watches the football in the lounge. Your mum comments unfavourably on this situation. Role play your response.
- You have parents who are not believers in Christ and, as a couple, you feel God calling you to go on a mission trip to a foreign country or a rural part of South Africa. You suspect your parents will not approve of the idea. Role-play the discussion you have with them.
- Your parents paid for your tertiary education, but after a few years of working, you decide (after much discussion with your spouse!!) that you would like to quit your job and pursue your passion for art. Discuss with your partner at what stage of the decision making process you would have this discussion with your parents and what principles/tips you would bear in mind whilst having it. Role-play the discussion.

CHAPTER 5:

FINANCES

INTRODUCTION

(Some of the information in this section is taken directly from P-J Smyth's "Money Matters". Refer to www.godfirst.co.za for this and other resources by P-J Smyth.)

Why are we covering Finances in a pre-marriage course?

Reason 1: Because Money Is Central To Life

We need money to live. In one way or another, finance and economics occupies much of our waking moments. It affects practically everything in our lives. Studies have shown that 50% of divorces in the USA are attributed to financial stress in one form or another.

A survey in USA, RSA and Europe of 470 000 people from every different financial background were asked the question, 'How much do you need to live comfortably?' Almost everybody responded "about 10% more than we currently have". Interesting!

Reason 2: There Is a Strong Biblical Emphasis on Money

Although there are just over 200 verses in the bible on faith, about the same number on salvation, there are over 2 300 references to finance. Jesus said more about money than about heaven and hell combined because he knew that money cuts deeply into our character.

Scripture is full of examples, advice, commands and warnings about money, which are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Reason 3: Different Attitudes

Because money is a part of our everyday life, it is important that you and your partner discuss money matters before you are married to eliminate unnecessary strife and tension.

PRACTICAL EXERCISE:

DISCUSSION ON FAMILY BACKGROUNDS, APPROACH TO FINANCES

Spend 10 minutes discussing your different backgrounds and upbringing with your partner, with the emphasis on finance. At this point you are only sharing stories, you aren't trying to agree on the approach you are going to take to finances in your marriage (that will come later).

BELOW ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How would you describe your parents' approach to money and spending (keeping in mind that they may each have had a different approach)?
- Was money something openly discussed in your family?
- Who was responsible for running the finances in your family? Who decided on what could be purchased?
- What good/bad money habits have you developed over the years?

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

What does the bible teach us about money?

Scripture is full of examples, advice, commands and warnings about money. Below are a few biblical principles to keep in mind around this topic.

Trusting God's provision

Heb 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

True wealth

Matt 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

God never created man to be satisfied by things. True wealth is treasure in heaven.

Luk 16:10 – 11 Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

God doesn't consider money as true wealth. Through this scripture God is trying to help us see the big picture so that we won't put money ahead of family, friends and possibly even your integrity.

God blesses us so that we can bless others

Pro 11:25 – 26 Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered. The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.

Keep money in its place

Mat 6:24 No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

We live in a world where the pursuit of money can sometimes elevate the status of money to a god-like status, something possibly worth dying for. A singer called 50 Cent produced an album 'Get Rich or Die Tryin' – that about sums it up!

Be careful of greed or trusting in wealth

Luke 12:16–21 Then he told them this story: "The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He talked to himself: 'What can I do? My barn isn't big enough for this harvest.' Then he said, 'Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll gather in all my grain and goods, and I'll say to myself, Self, you've done well! You've got it made and can

now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!' Just then God showed up and said, 'Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods-who gets it?' That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God."

Mk 10:21 – 23 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

Remember...

Money is a neutral commodity - it isn't good and it isn't bad. It is your view of money and how you use it that makes money a good or a bad thing in your life.

BUDGETING

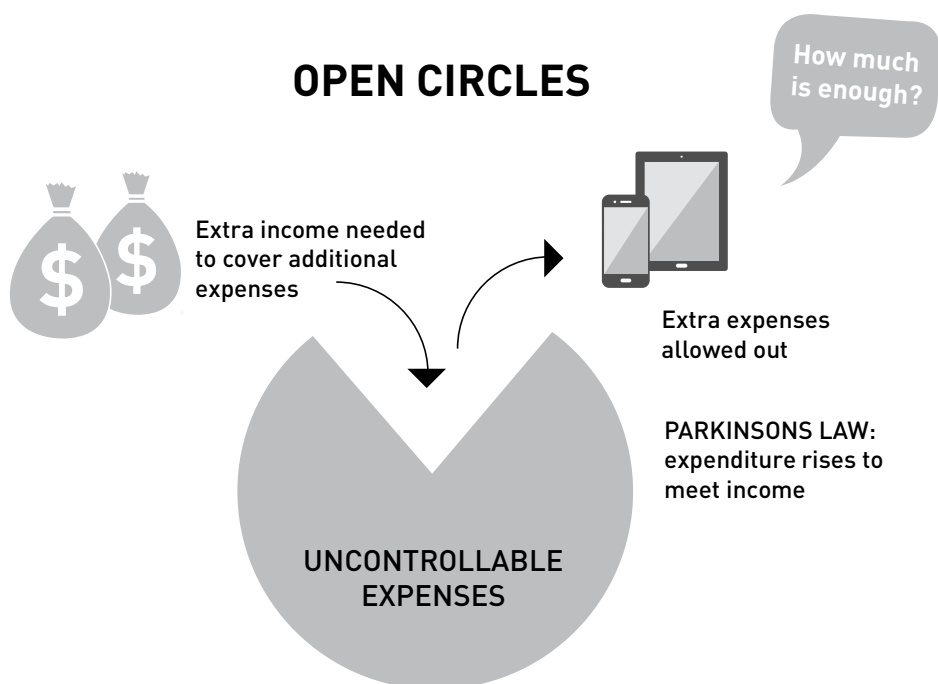
Budgeting is the most practical approach to discussing and planning your finances together as a couple.

Closed vs open circle budgeting

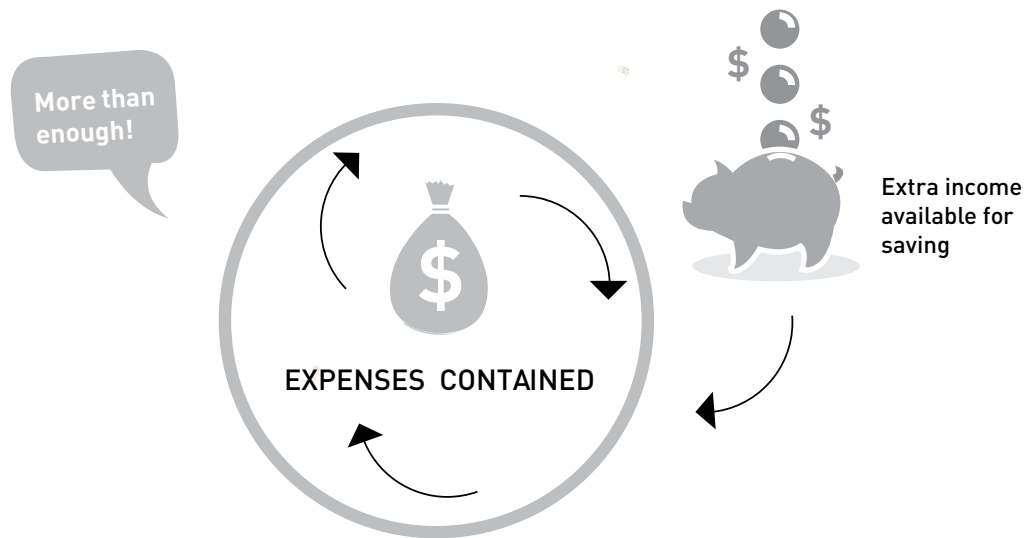
(This topic is taken mostly from material by Craig Hill and Earl Pitts.)

This is a practical teaching that should help us to make money our servant rather than master. It hinges on answering the question, "How much is enough?" If you never answer that question, a person or family will live with what is called an 'open circle system'. Any financial increase that comes into this circle will serve only to expand the circle.

A family who has answered this question will live with a 'closed circle system'. Financial increase that comes to this family will be prayed over to discover the purpose for which the Lord sent it rather than assuming that it is to be used for increasing the circle in personal consumption.



CLOSED CIRCLES



What types of things should be included inside the circle?

Our needs, obligations and necessities

Is this biblical? Yes:

"My God shall supply all my needs..." (Phil 4:19)

Things for our enjoyment – our wants

Is this biblical? Yes:

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim 6:17)

But the challenging question is of course what constitutes a need and how far should we take this matter of enjoyment? Interestingly, the bible refuses to give a one-size-fits-all answer to this. God wants us to seek him and operate out of a place of inner conviction and faith rather than religiously, mindlessly, heartlessly obeying an external law.

Here is a verse from the bible to help us see this:

Prov 30:8 - 9 Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God.

Neither poverty nor wealth brings holiness. Wealth brings its attractions to sin but so does poverty. The truly poor are not the truly spiritual. A materialist can have little and still be a materialist. There is no position of wealth that is free from sin. And anyway, wealth is relative.

Before budgeting

- Set aside a time to discuss your budget. Make sure you have enough time, aren't tired, hungry or have just not come from an argument and that you won't be disturbed. Do it in Excel if you are able or have paper, pencil and a calculator ready.
- Launch it with a purpose in mind - what is your vision as a couple regarding finances? This is where your practical discussion about your backgrounds will be useful. E.g. Do you give away as much as possible from your excess? Do you spend as soon as you get? Do you sacrifice now, to spend later? Or are you a combination of the above.
- Answer the question: "How much is enough?"

Practical steps of budgeting

1. Record the numbers - keep a detailed and exact record for 3 months of EVERYTHING (all incoming and outgoing amounts) and keep slips to refer to. Make sure to separate business from private.
2. List your Inflows (income) & Outflows (expenses)
3. Break your expenses/outflows into the following categories:
 - a. Obligations (not negotiable)
 - b. Necessity (important)
 - c. Nice to have
 - d. Treat/Spoil

Determine which category your recorded outflows fall into and slot them in for the 3 months data that you have. Include giving and saving in your budget. Also, don't forget entertainment, marriage enrichment and "pocket money".

4. Determine what the material wants in your life are. We suggest that you make a list of all the material things that you, your spouse and family members' desire. You may also include gifts with which you may wish to bless others. Put a figure on each item and then prioritise the list. This requires a lot of discussion. Try not to isolate expenses to individuals. Keep account as a couple, don't keep score as individuals.
5. Total the columns and deduct the grand total of your outflows from your inflows total. Divided by 3, you'll get a monthly average.
6. Close the circle – prayerfully decide/agree on what is what and then make sure your average monthly income covers your average monthly expenses (i.e. balance your budget without using debt).

On the next page is a basic example of what a budget might look like:

INCOME		
Salary (after tax)		30,000
Other income		5,000
Total inflow		35,000
EXPENSES		
Obligations:	Bond - minimum payment	-10,000
	Bank charges	-100
	Tithe & Giving	-4,000
Necessities:	Clothes	-500
	Retirement Annuity Fund	-4,000
	Insurance - home & car	-1,000
	Life insurance	-1,000
	Water & Electricity & Rates	-1,000
	Phones	-400
	Groceries, toiletries, con- sumables	-3,000
	Petrol	-1,300
Nice to have:	Savings/Investments	-1,500
	Presents/Gifts	-400
	Gym	-200
	Cleaner & Gardener	-1,200
Treats:	Entertainment/Date nights	-1,500
	Holidays	-1,500
Total outflow		-32,600
NET IN/(OUT) FLOW		2,400

Accountability and agreement

It is important that husband and wife seek the Lord together and come into agreement over the amount for each column. P-J Smyth notes that he has worked with many people, single and married, at this point of closing the circle. In doing so, he has recognised there are strongholds in these people's hearts and minds of fear, guilt, shame and many other unresolved emotional issues stemming from past experience in dealing with finances. This exercise frequently brings such issues to the surface. If you find a similar thing happening to you, don't be discouraged. Simply draw near to God in prayer and seek help if necessary.

Does the circle ever change in size?

When your circle is closed, you have flexibility within your own circle and there may be some adjustments between or in columns. The circle should be reviewed at least once a year or whenever your circumstances change. The size of the budget will reflect your particular situation and season in life.

If you need more money, for example in the food column in a given month, you make the decision to curtail spending in other columns for a week or so and divert the money to food. At the end of the month, when you total the columns, you will be over budget in food, but under budget in other columns. However, the grand total remains the same and is within the overall budget.

If the Lord instructs you to give above what you have planned in your circle for giving, then you have the joy of making money your slave. You decide to cut back on certain expenses for that month, or to delay the purchase of some items, thereby creating the ability to bless others.

The size of your circle is not a problem for God

Developing a closed circle answers the question "How much is enough?" Every person has obligations, necessities and wants, however not all have been agreed to by God. He is our Source and if He's agreed on our closed circle then He will provide. When we delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us our heart's desires (Psalm 37:4). Once all our needs and wants are met, the Lord is then able to provide overflow so we can eliminate bad debt, invest and fund kingdom advancement.

A budget is a helpful tool to help us determine and stick to our new 'closed circle'. A love of money can make us feel that a budget is too restrictive and too controlling. In reality, to have a closed circle is very freeing.

Review:

Set aside regular times to review/track your budget. Start with every 3 months or so at the beginning of your marriage. Also after job/house changes; children; other lifechanges; big expenses or unforeseen expenses.

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

To get you started on your own budget, go through the list and mark which column you individually classify each line. Compare with your partner and discuss any differences.

POSSIBLE BUDGET ITEMS	OBLIGATION	NECESSITY	NICE TO HAVE	TREAT / SPOIL
Bank charges				
Car maintenance and payments				
Clothes				
DSTV / Magazine subscriptions				
Electricity				
Entertainment (eating out, theatre, movies)				
Gardener / Domestic worker / Nanny				
Gifts (birthdays, Christmas, weddings)				
Giving (over and above tithe)				
Groceries / household products / toiletries				
Haircuts				
Holidays / travel				
House maintenance				
Housing bond / rent				
Income tax				
Insurance (life, disability, home and car)				
Medical aid and other medical expenses				
Pension fund / provident fund / retirement annuity				
Petrol and parking				
Pets				
Phones and internet				
Rates and water				
Regular committed giving to the church				
Savings				
Sport and recreation (e.g. gym)				
Supporting of family members (e.g. a parent)				

Some other tips:

- Plan for big expenses (and remember the concept of delayed gratification rather than instant acquisition)
- Functional economics – the cheapest thing that does the job properly
- A budget is only a budget if you stick to it
- Accountability or spending thresholds (decide on a maximum price before consulting each other (e.g. a R500 threshold)
- Your budget seldom clicks first time – keep at it!
- Monitor your cash flow (often different from budgeting)
- Think about and discuss whether you will have 1 or 2 bank accounts, how you will structure your banking, use of joint accounts etc.

DEBT

Some examples of personal debt: home loans, car loans, furniture hire purchase, clothing store cards, credit cards, micro loans.

Three main things that the bible says about debt:

- The bible warns against debt, but does not forbid debt
Let no debt remain outstanding... (Rom 13:8)
The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender. (Prov 22:7)
- To be in a position to lend is a sign of blessing (See Deut 28:12; Ps 37:21,26; Ps 112:5) but does not legitimise debt. The point is that it is a blessing to have excess money and be able to help another person out of the bondage of debt.
See Mat 18 where Jesus commends a master who forgives a debt.
- When you lend don't expect repayment
See Luke 6:34. The person borrowing is morally obligated to make the repayment, but the lender should lend as he might give, expecting nothing in return.

'Okay' debt

This is where the asset has a value in excess of the debt. For example, a mortgage of R900 000 to buy a house worth R1.3m can be classified as an okay debt. Credit cards are okay if paying off the full balance monthly.

'Bad' debt

This is incurred in buying consumable goods today, with tomorrow's money. (E.g. Furniture and home appliances or clothing on six months to two years payment terms; running credit cards on 'budget' or extended payment terms.)

Be accountable

Acknowledge any debts to yourself and your partner. You need to be honest and accountable to each other. If you are in a problem situation, get help from a debt counsellor!

When is debt really dangerous?

- When there is no collateral back-up
- When it tempts us to violate our convictions
- When it tempts us to lessen our giving to God
- When it prohibits us from responding to the call of the Holy Spirit to move or change

Getting out of 'bad' debt

Total, all-out attack is the only way. And you will need to be accountable to another person. It is important that you step up to your debt. Acknowledge it to yourself and to your creditor/s by going to see them. Make an offer to repay the amount due over time and stick to that plan no matter what.

Stop getting into any further debt. Cut up your clothing account cards. If you continue to use a credit card, make sure you clear your credit card monthly and that you only use it for budgeted items.

Once you have adopted this attitude an amazing thing happens – God gets involved and helps you!

Questions to ask before lending money to someone

- Can I cope financially and attitude-wise if they never pay back?
- Can I give this in the spirit of a gift?
- Will they spend it on legitimate things?
- Will it negatively affect our relationship?
- Given the dangers and pressures of debt, am I helping them get into bondage?

SAVING & INVESTING

We must never rely on the wealth that we have. As believers, our trust should be in God. We are, however, called to be responsible and wise with what we've been given.

The bible advises us to save for the future: *Prov 21:20 Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling, but a foolish man devours it.*

Craig Hill and Earl Pitts: Saving needs to be for a specific purpose. We are not meant, by God, to simply accumulate resources "for a rainy day". Saving should be designated for a specific purpose, which can help prevent you from trusting in this "nest egg" you're accumulating rather than trusting in the Lord for our provision.

It is legitimate for saving to be designated for your want list, as mentioned already. Perhaps you hold a job that is paid on commission and your income fluctuates monthly. In this case, savings may simply be monies whose purpose is to stabilise your cash flow over a period of time.

When saving is good

- To be prudent (Pr 6:6-8, Gen 41).
- To help develop our authority over money.

When saving is bad

When it is from a greed/hoarder/miser mentality (Luke 12:18-19, Prov 11:28, 1 Tim 6). Hoarding is an attempt to so completely cover our material bases that God becomes unnecessary. Saving means not presuming on God. Hoarding means 'replacing' God. It is not about the amount, but the attitude.

Craig Hill and Earl Pitts: The purpose of the investment of money is to cause money to work for us in the creation of riches. Money can be placed in investment opportunities that are offered in the world system, such as stocks, bonds, mutual funds, etc. Investments should also be made for a specific purpose. There may be funds that are for sowing and reaping purposes in the Kingdom, in which you are to sow into a financial ministry or project and believe God for a multiplied return for a larger Kingdom purpose. The early chapters of Acts report individuals selling property to liberate funds for God's work.

(The following material is mostly from Money, Possessions and Eternity by Randy Alcorn)

Whilst scripture doesn't directly teach that we should get involved in investing, it provides illustrations of investing (Pr 31:16, Mat 25:14-29, Luke 19:12-19). God's encouragement to lay up treasure in heaven should caution the Christian investor. However, we are also encouraged to be shrewd, and to steward our resources to the best of our ability.

Questions to ask before investing

- Because my investment also profits the business in which I am investing, am I sure that this business is not supporting ungodly enterprises using 'my money'?
- Am I grieving God with a 'get-rich-quick' plan? (Prov 21:5; Ecc 5:13-17).
- Is it a responsible risk or is it gambling (irresponsibility)?
- Is my motivation to make a profit for legitimate needs of my family and to give to the kingdom, or is my motivation: greed (1 Tim 6:9); envy (Ps 73:3) or pride (1 Tim 6:17).

Guidelines for investing

- Never risk money you can't afford to lose
- Never make uninformed or hasty decisions
- Never be fooled by an investment opportunity that sounds too good to be true - it probably is!
- Be just as cautious about investing in a 'Christian' company as any other company.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Look at your vision and approach. Consider the following in your discussion:

- What are you going to do with any excess money: spend it, save it, give it away?
- How will you structure your banking: 1 or 2 bank accounts, use of secondary card holders etc?
- Who might be in charge for what (paying accounts, internet banking etc). Remember it's not necessarily a man's role!

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Ante Nuptial Contracts – this is something you need to decide on before your wedding. Consult a reputable lawyer that will look at your individual circumstances and desires and budget for this.
- Everyone needs a will. You can do a joint will. It is recommended to consult a lawyer.
- Life insurance is advisable, depending on your circumstances (e.g. bonds, children, supporting non-working spouse etc.)
- Medical Aid is important in South Africa. Basic hospital cover is advisable as a minimum.

- Retirement may seem far away but the earlier you start planning for it, the better.
- If you feel overwhelmed with all the responsibilities, a visit to a reputable financial advisor can be a good investment!

THE DISCIPLINE OF SIMPLICITY

In his book entitled “Celebration of Discipline”, Richard Foster encourages us to adopt the discipline of simplicity. Here is a summary of part of his teaching:

**We must learn to buy things for their usefulness,
rather than for status**

Goods are purchased for their functionality and not the name brand they carry, or the extra features they espouse. Resist the temptation to buy the most feature-full model. Rather, only buy those things that you need.

Reject anything that produces an addiction in you

Ask yourself the question: ‘Is this thing going to add value to my life, or will it enslave me?’ Be a slave only to God.

Develop a habit of giving things away. De-accumulate.

Give away those things which are surplus to your needs and which may be useful to others. Don’t sell these items. When you give, you break the power of Mammon, and more importantly, you deposit in your heavenly account. The return on this account is multiplied for the rest of your life.

Don’t be sucked in by the lure of modern gadgetry

Mammon uses advertising to captivate our minds, so beware of these attractions.

Learn to enjoy things without owning them

You can stay with friends in their homes and admire and enjoy their home without feeling that you have to own one just like it.

Develop a deeper appreciation for God’s creation

If you go to the sea, you can really enjoy it without having to buy a new jet-ski or a power boat. If you go to the mountains, you don’t need the latest climbing and camping gear – stop, smell the grass, listen to the birds, admire the flowers.

Watch out for the ‘buy-now, pay later’ syndrome

If you find yourself continuing to buy beyond your means to repay out of your current salary, then cut up your credit card. Don’t use tomorrow’s money today, because there may not be any money tomorrow to meet your obligations.

Shun whatever would distract you from your main goal

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Be accountable to someone with regard to all your financial dealings. This kind of open transparency can be very liberating. Don’t be afraid to do this, but make sure the person to whom you become accountable is someone who is trustworthy.

CHAPTER 6:

SEX AND INTIMACY

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

Although some may view this topic as potentially embarrassing or awkward, we want to start by saying that sex is beautiful! Our goal will be to look at it openly and honestly but also with confidentiality and respect. We fully recognise that it is both a private and intimate matter.

[One of the books we refer to extensively is “Sheet Music” by Dr Kevin Leman and we encourage you to get your own copy and read the entire book! It is one of the most helpful resources on this topic that we have been able to find. Any page references in this chapter refer to this book.]

INFLUENCES

It’s important right up front to recognise the HUGE influence of culture and society on the way we see sex and the way we perceive and think about it.

Some of the misconceptions that exist are:

- sex is simply an isolated event
- sex is nothing – it’s become a trivialised thing which simply fulfils a physical need and a biological release
- sex is everything – to many it has become something of an idol, the ultimate experience in life

We also have to recognise the role of the media on our expectations about sex – think of popular magazines and what they tell you about the frequency or duration of sex. Think about the movies – sex tends to happen on date one! Both the man and the woman know exactly what to do and can read each other’s minds; socks disappear, candles light themselves, romantic music plays, they never need to use the bathroom, and they climax simultaneously with very little effort or communication!

Another influence is your rulebook – the unconscious, unwritten but very influential beliefs you hold about the way things should be done (especially in bed). These include things you are comfortable with and things you are uncomfortable with. This rulebook is influenced by parental influences, background and upbringing. These assumptions and expectations can be limiting. *“The way you look at sex is the way you look at sex – but that doesn’t make it the right way or the only way to look at sex.”* (p.32). It can be very helpful to become aware of and make these things conscious.

For example, to discover some of these unwritten and often unconscious rules, ask a few questions:

- What gets me most upset in bed?
- What in general, most fulfils me sexually?
- What makes me lose all interest in sex?
- What generates the most interest in sex?
- What sexual request or act creates the most fear in me?

However, we want to focus on going back to the original creator of sex and learn what He had in mind for us when He created it...

GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

Genesis 1:27

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number."

Genesis 2:24

24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

We need to see that sex was given by God. He designed it! He created gender and sexuality; in fact his first command to man and woman encourages sexual intimacy and union. This passage also shows us why God reserves sex for marriage as it gives us the relational context for sexuality and sexual intimacy. Sex is intended to take place in the context of a meaningful, committed relationship between one man and one woman.

A reason for this is that good sex is not easy and it's very personal. Every person is unique in their desires and pleasure. Therefore FAMILIARITY and TRUST and RESPECT are needed. It takes time, experience, knowledge and practice to excel at being a good lover. Marriage is this context! Marriage provides a lifetime process of learning and enjoying how to be good lovers – you get a whole life to grow, explore and enjoy each other.

We also see that sex is an expression of deep intimacy between two people, which brings body, soul, spirit, emotions and minds together. It is a profound experience of your unity as a couple as "the two become one flesh". The goal of sexuality is to express oneness and intimacy with your partner. Good, fulfilling sex can be an amazing, powerful marital glue.

WHAT WE LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

Let's look at three passages which teach us something about God's perspective on sex...

PASSAGE A:

1 Corinthians 7:2-5

2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

From this passage there are TWO key ideas we can pick up:

A balanced and fulfilling sexual life for both

We see that there are two people in the relationship and both the man and woman have needs to be fulfilled. Mutual satisfaction is an important principle and goal. Sex is to be equal and reciprocal; each has the right to initiate and respond. The aim is two people who are both sexually fulfilled.

There is also a sense of belonging. So do everything you can to meet your partner's needs. This is where unselfishness is demonstrated as you put someone else's needs above your own. The aim is to give each other pleasure, not just getting fulfilment for yourself.

You are the God-given means by which your partner can express and fulfil their sexuality. Your partner has no place else to go to express sexual intimacy.

A regular rhythm of intimacy

The instruction is clear: do not withhold from each other which leads to frustration. Another version of the Bible says "Do not rob each other". Participate actively and regularly in sexual intimacy. Ensure there is a rhythm of intimacy – this will be different for each couple and different in the various seasons of your life – but ensure that it is a regular rhythm.

"When you agreed to marry this man or this woman, you put yourself in a position to meet a need in his or her life that no other person can legitimately meet – sexual fulfillment. If you're not willing to commit to having sex with this person two to three times a week for the rest of your life, don't get married. Certainly pregnancy and sickness and other unforeseen problems will alter this – but in general, to get married is to commit to a regular time of sexual intimacy. This means that not being 'in the mood' is an interesting sidelight but should never determine your actions. You made a commitment and you'll need to be faithful to that commitment... All of us have times when we're tired, preoccupied or not feeling very close to our spouse. But a good marriage calls us to rise above our apathy. 1 Peter 4: 8 says 'Love each other deeply' or another interpretation 'Love each other at full strength.' I like that thought – it means I'm not going to give my spouse my half-best; I'm going to use my full strength to please her and give her everything I've got!" (p.202 – 203)

But remember that this is all to be done joyfully! Within these needs and principles we need to keep a sense of freedom, a sense of exploration, loving abandonment, creativity, variety, spontaneity, excitement and enthusiasm. Be open and willing to practice how to be a better lover; keep your sex life fresh and fun; and study your partner until you are an expert!

PASSAGE B - SONG OF SOLOMON

These passages give us examples of sexual enjoyment. We can clearly see the delight in each other's bodies that these two lovers have. They affirm and communicate what they like and admire and they are passionate!

Song of Solomon 5:10-16 (The Message) SHE SAYS:

10-16 My dear lover glows with health— red-blooded, radiant! He's one in a million. There's no one quite like him! My golden one, pure and untarnished, with raven black curls tumbling across his shoulders. His eyes are like doves, soft and bright, but deep-set, brimming with meaning, like wells of water. His face is rugged, his beard smells like sage, His voice, his words, warm and reassuring. Fine muscles ripple beneath his skin, quiet and beautiful. His torso is the work of a sculptor, hard and smooth as ivory. He stands tall, like a cedar, strong and deep-rooted, A rugged mountain of a man, aromatic with wood and stone. His words are kisses, his kisses words. Everything about him delights me, thrills me through and through! That's my lover, that's my man....

Song of Solomon 7 (The Message) HE SAYS:

1-9 Shapely and graceful your sandaled feet, and queenly your movement— Your limbs are lithe and elegant, the work of a master artist. Your body is a chalice, wine-filled. Your skin is silken and tawny like a field of wheat touched by the breeze. Your breasts are like fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is carved ivory, curved and slender. Your eyes are wells of light, deep with mystery. Quintessentially feminine! Your profile turns all heads, commanding attention. The feelings I get when I see the high mountain ranges —stirrings of desire, longings for the heights—remind me of you, and I'm spoiled for anyone else! Your beauty, within and without, is absolute, dear lover, close companion. You are tall and supple, like the palm tree, and your full breasts are like sweet clusters of dates. I say, "I'm going to climb that palm tree! I'm going to caress its fruit!" Oh yes! Your breasts will be clusters of sweet fruit to me, Your breath clean and cool like fresh mint, your tongue and lips like the best wine.

In many ways Scripture's teaching is this:

"Don't let anyone besides your spouse enjoy your sexual charms in any way, but then unleash those charms in their full fury upon your husband or wife. Channel all your sexual energy and appeal into one direction. Keep the dam up when others are around; don't let a trickle escape through the walls. But when you're behind closed doors, alone with your spouse, open up the floodgates and let the water flow at full force." (p.179)

From these passages we can see the importance of talking to each other specifically and openly as you share your heart about sex. No two men and no two women are alike – so forget about generalisations and stereotypes! You need individual personalised communication so you can develop sexual IQ – knowing your partner's likes and dislikes, knowing what most excites your spouse. Find out what sexual language your spouse most wants you to speak. Throw in some variety, but always favour his or her primary attraction. Good lovers learn to know their lover better than they know themselves. You've got to stop viewing sex through your perception alone and start viewing it through your partner's eyes. Good marital sex is about learning to love someone else the way he or she wants to be loved.

PASSAGE C

Hebrews 13

4 Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral

We're reminded here to guard and honour our sexual intimacy. Sex is intended to be a private matter. Don't let others intrude into this private world. Guard your sense of unity. Don't discuss details of your love life easily – don't joke about it or be too casual. At all times maintain the privacy of your bedroom – make it a sanctuary; romantic, private, a place of no conflict.

A FINAL THOUGHT:

INNOCENCE VERSUS INFORMATION

"Couples rarely suffer from a lack of information as much as they suffer from a lack of innocence in the marital bed. You can make up for a lack of information after you are married; the lack of innocence may mark your relationship forever." (p.20)

EXERCISE 1:

For the two of you to discuss ...

1. Are there any adjustments you wish to make regarding our physical intimacy during the rest of our engagement?
2. If there is something I want to discuss with you about our sexual intimacy what is the best way for me to do this?
3. Who should we go to for help if we're struggling with physical intimacy?
4. Is there something you don't think you'd want to do sexually?
5. What are your sexual expectations for our honeymoon? What are your sexual expectations for our first year?
6. If we are not having sex regularly enough then how should I address it?
7. Is there something that could impact our intimacy that we haven't yet spoken about (e.g. pornography, abuse, past relationships)?
8. How would you describe your attitude towards sex?
9. Some of my fears around sexual intimacy are...
10. Do you find it difficult to discuss sex? What are some of the reasons for this?
11. Have we agreed on a contraception method we both feel comfortable with?

Advice for the honeymoon:

- Sexual adjustment takes time – enjoy the process.
- Don't 'plan' anything for the first couple of days of honeymoon – go with the flow.
- Don't rush the first time. Let it come naturally but discuss expectations etc. so you are on the same page.
- Write down your wedding day memories while they are still fresh.
- Make as little contact with the outside world as possible.
- Don't change destinations too often – the focus should be on relaxing and enjoying each other.
- If possible spend the first two nights of honeymoon at the same place.

General tips:

- Keep your bedroom as a special, romantic and sacred place - no TV, no fighting in bed etc. Solve problems before entering the bedroom.
- Foreplay begins long before you get an erection.
- Emotional stress such as a disagreement will affect your sexual appetite.
- Have sex as often as you can because there will be times when you won't.
- After the first couple of times share likes and dislikes – what you find pleasurable, what you don't.
- Learn what each other's needs are.
- Be sensitive and unselfish.
- Ask questions and discuss as openly as possible.
- Gain knowledge from good sources.
- Mix it up – multiple positions extend the sex duration and heighten the climax. Variety is the spice of life so be free to explore and discover. Vary the time of day, location, positions etc. (Key questions: Do we both enjoy this? Does it add fun and pleasure? Does it refresh our relationship?)
- Create time for romance and sex – getaways are important. Plan sexual encounters – don't always expect it to just happen! Prepare the way...
- See sex as a joint commitment.
- Problems are often manifested in sex – it is like a gauge of the health of your marriage and intimacy levels.
- If you realise there is sexual baggage or sexual problems seek professional help as soon as possible.

CHAPTER 7:

DEALING WITH CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE

EXPECT TO FIGHT!

Many couples who are Christ-followers believe the myth that, because they have placed Jesus first in their marriage, they will experience a relationship free of conflict - a life of unfailing peace and harmony. And even if you aren't a believer, and are recently engaged, you may still be in the "honeymoon phase" of your relationship - the time when your spouse can do nothing wrong in your eyes and you can count the number of tiffs you've had on one hand. Unfortunately, marriages totally free of conflict are few and far between, and realistically, there will come a time when you will disagree with your spouse over some issue or another. You need to realise that every happy, successful couple has approximately ten areas of disagreement that they will never resolve. Many couples list these 'irreconcilable differences' as grounds for divorce, when in fact they are part of every good marriage. Successful couples learn to make it work in spite of their differences.

COMMON CAUSES OF MARITAL CONFLICT

Differences in family backgrounds

Every family is unique in terms of how they go about their day to day lives. For example, families may start their day off together differently; there may be differences in what happens on holidays, who does what chores at home or the way birthdays are celebrated. You may have certain expectations of your partner coming into marriage around these areas, some that you may be conscious of at this point and some that might only surface once you are married. When these expectations are not met, conflict often arises as you may struggle to understand why your way of doing things is no longer the 'right' way.

Personality differences

It is said that opposites attract, which is often true. You may find that you and your partner are one of these couples, or you may at least know of a couple who are very different from each other.

Examples of common "opposites" are:

- An outgoing person and a quieter, more reserved person
- A neat freak and a slob
- A feeler and a thinker
- A scatterbrain and someone who pays attention to detail
- A saver and a spendthrift

Personality differences in couples are great and create interest in relationships but be aware that after marriage these differences may start to become a source of irritation.

Differences in values

Conflict in this area can range from things like how you plan to raise your children, what you place importance on in terms of where you spend your money, how often you visit family and what you spend your free time doing.

The difference between men and women

There is no need to debate the issue that men and women are wired completely differently! This single main difference can alone be the cause for potential conflict. Common complaints like “he never talks about his feelings” or “she always overanalyzes things” are just two examples that often arise from these differences. Because you are so different with regards to how you think, feel, process information, express emotion, react and converse, there will be conflict somewhere along the line!

SHOULD YOU AVOID CONFLICT?

Absolutely not! The absence of conflict does not necessarily guarantee a good marriage. It is not whether couples fight, but how they fight that is of importance. Once this is understood, marital conflict no longer represents a crisis but an opportunity for growth.

The number one predator of divorce is the avoidance of conflict. We often avoid conflict is because we believe it could lead to divorce. In the beginning of our marriages we avoid conflict because we are deeply in love, and believe that being in love is about agreeing. We're afraid that if we disagree or fight we'll ruin the relationship. Later on we may avoid conflict because when we try to deal with our differences, things get so out of hand and our fights are so destructive and upsetting that we simply shut down. After a few bad blow-ups, we become determined to avoid conflict at all costs.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T RESOLVE CONFLICT EFFECTIVELY AND TIMEOUSLY?

When your spouse says an unkind remark to you or you to them, it hurts, emotionally and relationally. If you do not resolve this feeling of hurt immediately a “wound” opens up and over time “infection” can set in. This may cause you to think negatively about your spouse and these negative thoughts may occur at unexpected times after the conflict. These negative thoughts and feelings can sow seeds of doubt into different areas of your marriage. You may start wondering about your spouse's character, integrity or whether they truly love you. Walls of separation begin to form between you.

Unhealed wounds can also trigger feelings of anger. Anger is an extremely destructive emotion can lead to further, far more heated and damaging conflicts when similar incidences arise.

WHAT OUR CULTURE TEACHES US ABOUT RESOLVING CONFLICT

There are a number of different influences in our culture that try to teach us how to resolve conflict. It's important to recognise some of these influences, as well as their flaws.

Print media

When referring to print media, examples would be the relationship advice you seem to find in almost every issue of the Cosmo, Men's Health and other monthly glossy magazines.

Here are some examples of the type of advice that you will find:

From the Cosmopolitan on the topic of salvaging the troubled relationship:

"For many, the only choice is to start afresh with a more liberated male. But according to experts, you do have the power to bring a stubborn man to the negotiating table Overcome the urges to play "good girl" Earn and control your own money, make an unexpected sexual request, dress sexy – for you, carve out your own space, develop your own quirks."

Also from the Cosmopolitan, illustrating good ways to say bad things to your partner:

"`You know Chloe', I said, `I've always really loved the way you treat people. You're about as kind and considerate as Lady Macbeth on a "good" day.' Chloe said nothing, but her eyes were as wide and heartbreaking as Bambi's. Dinner was served. Then it was her turn. 'There's something I've been meaning to tell you, Peter,' she said. 'The way you stuff your mouth with food compares favourably to a prisoner who's just been released from Devil's Island.'"

Basically, print media teaches us the following "rules" when it comes to resolving conflict:

- Protect your own interests at all costs
- If there is a problem, walk away
- If the relationship is no longer satisfying, find a new one
- You decide what is right and wrong in the relationship

These rules clearly display very poor conflict resolution, because there simply is no resolution. It's all about what you can get out of the relationship. It is in clear contradiction with what God would want.

Television

Between talk shows, soap operas and day-time dramas, we have more than enough exposure when it comes to dealing with conflict in relationships. Lying, back-stabbing, infidelity, hatred and revenge between spouses is the daily fare. It doesn't get any better during prime-time television either. Inane sitcoms try to make us laugh about conflict, and movies and series expose us to regular heartbreak, family warfare and relationship confusion.

When you feed on a steady diet of television each day and then a conflict with your spouse rears its ugly head at bedtime, what do you rely on to resolve it? Do you allow it to escalate into a shouting match

or worse like the couples on TV? Do you follow the advice of a celebrity or so-called expert from a talk show? Do you make a big joke of it like the sitcoms do? Or do you storm away and seek consolation with another man or woman like the soap operas do?

One significant element to healing marital hurts is all but missing from television: God.

Unless you're watching a Christian station – and even then you need to be discerning about which religious programmes you watch, you rarely hear anything resembling a healthy, biblical solution to conflict resolution.

Friends and peers

When we're fighting with our spouse, we often turn to friends for advice. You may have friends that seem like they've always got it together, friends that seem to have "rosy" relationships and are eager to hand out advice. Having friends you can confide in is wonderful, but be careful. The problem is many of these people have also been influenced by the message of our culture. Also, the longer you are together with your spouse, the more "your friends" become "our friends". You may be putting your friends in an awkward situation as they are often forced to choose sides, and this can be damaging to your friendship further down the road.

Family

Many people unfortunately come from home where their parents were poor examples of how to resolve conflict effectively. Conflict and pain may have been frequent and forgiveness and resolution infrequent or totally absent. These people carry what they have learnt at home into their marriages unawares, and bad patterns are repeated.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THESE INFLUENCES

At this point you may be realising that there may have been many bad influences on resolving conflict in your life, and you may be feeling even a sense of hopelessness because of it. You may feel destined to live out the same ineffective patterns in your own marriage, especially when it comes to unconsciously modelling your parent's behaviour.

But that's like giving up on a garden because the soil is too hard or too rocky or infested with weeds. Have you ever heard of a pick, shovel, hoe and a little hard work? In the same way you can change the condition of the soil and unlearn bad patterns of dealing with conflict and learn new ones.

It is our God-given responsibility to cultivate good soil in our marriage relationships so that our children and grandchildren have a biblical pattern to follow in their marriages.

The psalmist wrote: "For [God] issued his decree to Jacob; he gave his law to Israel. He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their children, so the next generation might know them – even the children not yet born – that they in turn might teach their children. So each generation can set its hope anew on God, remembering his glorious miracles and commands" (Psalm 78 vs 5 – 7).

The family you came from is important, but not as important as the one you'll leave behind. Identify from your family of origin the barriers to communication and healthy conflict resolution. Gain whatever insight you can from your past, deal with the emotional pain of it, and then move on to developing new patterns that include confession and forgiveness of offences and healing of hurts.

SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

These last two sections will give you advice on how to manage conflict situations effectively. You might feel after reading some of the points that you would never be able to accomplish these things as they are so far from what you are used to, or could ever imagine doing, but try to put them into practise the next time you are in a conflict situation. You'll be amazed at how easier the conflict is to resolve, and will come away feeling like you have worked together, rather than against each other.

According to Dr John Gottman, who has been studying marriages for over twenty years, there are four bad practices in conflict resolution. In order of least to most dangerous, they are: **criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling.**

FIGHTING DIRTY – WHAT TO AVOID DURING TIMES OF CONFLICT

Criticism

Criticism involves making a personal attack on someone's personality or character. This is different to complaining about something. Complaining is a negative comment about something you may wish was different. Complaints begin with "I" and criticisms begin with "You".

***Example:** "I wish we could see more of my parents," is a complaint, whereas "you never take time to see my parents" is a criticism. There is a fine line between the two, but being criticised is far worse than receiving a complaint.*

Contempt

Contempt is so toxic that it will destroy a relationship whether a couple has been married five months or fifty years. According to Dr Gottman, what separates contempt from criticism "is the intention to insult and psychologically abuse your partner."

Contempt is aimed right at the heart of the person and ends up destabilising the relationship and inflicting pain. When contempt rears its ugly head, it overwhelms the marriage and obliterates every positive feeling couples may have for one another. The most common expressions of contempt are name calling, mockery, sarcasm and hostile humour.

Defensiveness

Once a couple acts contemptuously, defensiveness is the next step that makes matters worse. One or both of the partners feels victimised by the other, and neither is willing to take responsibility for setting things right. When one is bombarded by insults, the natural inclination is to defend oneself.

The reason why defensiveness is so destructive is that it becomes a reflex. The victim instinctively becomes defensive, but defensiveness tends to heighten conflict rather than resolve it. Every time you feel righteous, every time you make excuses and deny responsibility, you add to your marital misery.

Stonewalling

When you and your partner enter into cold war, you are in trouble. You then not only refuse to discuss the problem, but refuse to communicate at all.

Contrary to popular belief most stonewallers are men. Once they feel overwhelmed by emotions, they start withdrawing by keeping their faces immobile, avoiding eye contact and avoiding any indication that they are listening. Most stonewallers claim that they are trying not to make matters worse, when in fact stonewalling is a very powerful tool that conveys disapproval, icy distance and smugness.

FIGHTING FAIR – HOW TO TACKLE CONFLICT

Don't retreat

Many people find conflict so unpleasant, that they just run away from it. People who have been taught that it is wrong to fight, tend to run. Running does nothing to solve the conflict. In fact, running may even escalate the conflict as the other person becomes more and more frustrated and starts chasing after the runner.

Don't allow yourself to bury something that irritates you. Repressed irritations have a high rate of resurrection. Avoiding conflict by retreating and sweeping issues underneath the carpet, create false peace.

Happy couples may disagree vehemently, but they don't shut their partners out. When one brings up an issue, the other should listen attentively and from time to time paraphrase what the other says (You are worried about us overspending on the telephone?) to make sure the message is understood.

Choose your battles with great care

Love may be blind, but for some couples marriage is a magnifying glass. One of the major tasks of marriage is learning what can and should be changed (habits such as nagging or abusive language, for example) and what we can turn a blind eye to (the way a partner squeezes the toothpaste tube or hangs their clothes).

The secret here is to be willing to change yourself and not your partner. You can't make another person change.

So before you start nit picking about a triviality next time, ask yourself whether it is really worth the unpleasantness.

Also make sure that you choose a good place and time for the argument. Avoid using the bedroom for arguments. Timing is also important. If it is late at night and you are both tired, arguments can get out of hand more easily, as you struggle more to focus on the real issue.

Define the conflict clearly

Many couples bicker on a regular basis over just about anything. To eliminate this, when you feel the tension rising, ask each other “What exactly are we fighting about?” Once your partner understands the real issue he/she can empathise better and is in a better position to set the situation right.

Each party must state their feelings clearly

It is important that each party clearly states what he or she wants or needs. Dr Les and Leslie Parrott teach couples what they call the “X, Y, Z” theory in their book *Saving your marriage before it starts*. They tell couples to think of it as a game where you fill in the blanks with your particular gripe in mind: “In situation X, when you do Y, I feel Z.”

***For example:** “Last week, when you went shopping and bought two pairs of shoes, I was very upset because we can’t afford it if we want to save to buy a house.”*

Using this formula, they claim, will help you avoid insults and character assassination, allowing the partners to simply state how the other partner’s behaviour affects his/her feelings. This is far more constructive than saying to your partner: “You are a real shopaholic. You know we are trying to save to buy a house, but you are so selfish and never pull your weight.” Although this response may first come to mind, it will most likely only draw a defensive response that gets you beating around the bush for ages.

Set a time limit on the battle

Don’t get involved in a hundred-year war. When something you are discussing gets heated, forgive quickly and come back to discuss the conflict when both of you have cooled down. If you feel the tension rising again, go into problem-solving mode. Once each party has stated his feelings clearly, discuss how the problem can be solved, rather than harping on the issue for days.

Don’t call in the cavalry

Keep your arguments private and don’t call for reinforcements from especially parents or friends. Never involve your children in your arguments and expect them to choose sides. Don’t put each other down in front of family or friends either. Remember loyalty is one of the most important ingredients of marriage.

Marriage is, for the most part, a private affair. There are no objective referees or judge to stop it from getting out of hand.

Agree on perimeters beyond which your arguments must not go

These rules might include:

- We will never physically abuse each other.
- We will never go to bed angry.
- We will never involve third parties in our arguments.
- We will never walk out on an argument.
- We will never hit below the belt by calling each other names.
- We will never use abusive language.
- We will never lose confidence in the relationship, not trusting each other.
- We will never give up on each other.
- We will never lie to each other.
- We will never get involved in a cold war - not talking.

Treat each other with honour and respect

It is important to treat one another with honour and respect in our marriages more so when having an argument.

What exactly is honour? The meaning of the word is twofold: Firstly, honour is conferring value upon that person. Part of honour is deciding that your mate's opinions, concerns and expectations are just a little more valuable than your own. Honour does not involve the belief that your opinions, concerns and desires are somehow superior to your partner's. Conveying a superior attitude is the biggest killer of marriage and produces the most frustration, hurt and fear within marriage. Honour is a "lifting up," a holding up of your mate with reverence. It's the selfless process of proclamation: in honouring you are telling your mate that he or she is paramount in your life and his or her status in your hierarchy of values is above all petty arguments, disagreements and opinions.

Control your anger

Ephesians 4:26-27

In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

Learning to understand and process anger in a biblical way is an essential step and is part of being a follower of Christ. Christians who fail to handle anger responsibly cannot reflect the holiness or the love of God; that is to say, mismanaged anger is far from being holy and far from being loving. Anger is God's gift to man and when it's handled biblically it demonstrates both a reverence for God's holiness and commitment to loving people. When anger is processed properly, relationships are restored, wrongs are righted, and the world is a better place in which to live. A man or woman who learns to control anger responsibly has taken a giant step in Christian maturity.

Anger is, more often than not a secondary reaction to a primary feeling. Identify where the anger is coming from. Is it rooted in feelings of hurt, frustration, fear, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness inadequacy or guilt, etc? These are often trigger points. Try to get to the real issue at hand.

Negotiating a ceasefire – when you just can't seem to agree

In his book *Love and Anger in Marriage*, David Mace lists four ways to negotiate a disagreement:

Capitulation

Here a disagreement stops because one person chooses to surrender or yield to the other. The resistance stops. Capitulation is healthy only when:

- You have intensively discussed the issue, both parties airing their views
- You are not in a habit where one always gives in to the other
- The yielder willingly gives up his/her position as a gift to the spouse

Compromise

Compromise might sound like a cop-out, but at least it is a step in the right direction. Both parties are getting at least some of what they want. It is a quick and easy solution, but in the long haul, however, it is not always the best way of resolving conflict. It leaves too many unmet or half-met needs that will continue to grow, sores that will continue to fester.

Coexistence

Here the partners simply agree that their difference will not be resolved at this point in time. They agree to live in peace, setting aside this issue for the time being. Both partners know that conflict will rise again at some stage, but agree to deal with the issue then. This is not the best solution, but it will do when you do not have all the information you need to make a decision, or it will buy you time while the emotions cool off.

Collaboration

This is the most satisfying of the four options. Two people come up with what seems to be the perfect solution to the problem, a solution neither of them was likely to have come up with alone. Collaboration is a dialogue and both partners must be able to:

- Know what they want and believe they are entitled to it
- Express what they want
- Hear what the other person wants and not be threatened by it
- Think creatively in order to forge acceptable solutions for both partners

Real collaboration takes practice. The good news is that it is a learned skill, and we can all get better at it.

Applying the lasting principle of forgiveness

A healthy disagreement, like a good story, should have a beginning, middle and an end. When it is over, it is over. When you come to some sort of resolution, make up and bury the argument. Forgive readily when it's an over. The resolution process isn't complete until forgiveness has taken place. Don't leave the fight with resentment, anger or an "I'll get even" attitude. Forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling.

Pray together to seek God's wisdom and so put the seal on your love.

Although feelings may be hurt once the argument has finished, it's important not to let the sun go down on your anger. Therefore, try to identify your own contribution to the problem and seek forgiveness. How should we forgive? As Christ forgave us – unconditionally.

Colossians 3:13

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Always reaffirm your love for each other after a disagreement. Sit close together, touch hands or kiss and make up so that you open the door to return to the joys of your relationship.

5 LANGUAGES OF APOLOGY

Have you ever apologised to your partner, but it just doesn't feel like you're getting through to them? Sometimes, even after someone has apologised to us, we still feel like they haven't apologised properly. A part of this is due to our own insecurities and inability to forgive properly. Always look to yourself first, but interestingly, that feeling like someone hasn't apologised (even after they have) can be because you are speaking different languages. Like our different love languages, we can also miscommunicate in the way that we apologise to one another. It may be that you were offering an apology in a "language" that was foreign to your spouse!

Just as there are 5 Love Languages, which can be very helpful to understand, there are also 5 Languages of Apology (Gary Chapmen and Jennifer Thomas), which can be very useful to understand when making up with your spouse. They are:

- 1. Expressing regret:** If the person you've hurt has this language, they want to know "Do you understand how I'm feeling?" You need to say you are sorry and that you recognise how this has impacted them. List the hurtful effects of your action. Show remorse.
- 2. Accepting responsibility:** If the person you apologise to has this apology language, they want to hear "I am sorry for what I did, it was wrong what I did.". They want you to accept responsibility for what you did (or said) and acknowledge that it was wrong. Name your mistake and accept fault.
- 3. Restitution- Making Amends:** If someone has this apology language, what they really want to hear is "What can I do to make it right?" (How are they now? Is any debt owed or repayment due? How shall I make amends to you?)

4. Genuinely expressing the desire to change your behaviour: When this is someone's apology language, if your apology does not include a desire to change your behaviour, you have not truly apologised. Whatever else you say, they do not see it as being sincere. They want to hear something like, "I'll really try not to do that again". Repentance- literally means turning around 180 degrees. Engage in problem-solving. Don't make excuses

5. Requesting forgiveness: If you offend someone who has this apology language, the words "will you please forgive me?" are the words they want to hear. Requesting forgiveness is the way to touch their heart and is the way that feels sincere to them. Be patient in seeking forgiveness and reconciliation.

You can use the free online quiz <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/profile/apology/> to help determine which language of apology you and your spouse each speak.

SOURCES

1. Marriage Go Round by Dennis and Thia Korte
2. Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts by Drs. Les and Lesley Parrot
3. Husbands and Wives – Various Authors
4. Love and Anger In Marriage by David Mace
5. Anger by Paul Hegstrom
6. Healing The Hurt In Marriage by Dr Gary & Barbara Rosberg
7. Always Better On The Bigscreen (pre-marriage manual created by Carol Bester)

EXERCISE 1:

FOR THE TWO OF YOU TO DISCUSS ...

1. How was conflict resolved in your family of origin?

2. Has unresolved conflict damaged your relationship in any way? How?

3. Do you have trouble admitting fault? Does your partner?

4. Do you or your partner have trouble expressing forgiveness?

5. What are your biggest areas of conflict in your relationship?

6. How do you plan to resolve the issue and prevent it from coming up time and again?

EXERCISE 2:

This exercise will help you and partner to define what is unacceptable behaviour during an argument.

Each make a list of what you consider to be unacceptable behaviour first and then compare your list with your partner's and compile a final list together which you can paste behind your bedroom door.

INDIVIDUAL LIST

1. We will never _____
2. We will never _____
3. We will never _____

4. We will never
5. We will never
6. We will never
7. We will never
8. We will never
9. We will never
10. We will never

1. We will always
2. We will always
3. We will always
4. We will always
5. We will always
6. We will always
7. We will always
8. We will always
9. We will always
10. We will always

COMBINED LIST

1. We will never
2. We will never
3. We will never
4. We will never
5. We will never
6. We will never
7. We will never
8. We will never
9. We will never
10. We will never

1. We will always
2. We will always
3. We will always
4. We will always
5. We will always
6. We will always
7. We will always
8. We will always
9. We will always
10. We will always

CHAPTER 8:

CREATING A VISION FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

Look at these significant areas in your life:

- Spiritual development
- Marriage
- Family and Parenting
- Friendships
- Health/ Fitness
- Work
- Personal development (i.e. studies, projects, courses, books, etc.)
- Finances
- Service in the local church/ community contribution

Step 1:

- Create a visual picture of your vision (a collage of words, pictures etc.) Use pictures/ words/ phrases/ images.
- As a Christ-follower you would want to hear from God on this and what you believe God is calling you to - through His word, whispers, other people who have spoken into your life etc. Pray before you begin, asking God to give you a sense of His purpose and vision for you as a couple and what you believe your relationship should look like.
- As a couple first do this individually and then discuss this with each other.
- Begin putting these pictures/words together in a shared collage that reflects you as a couple.
- This is not simply a reflection of what your relationship is like NOW but more about dreaming what it could be like, and what you would like it to be like.
- There should be a sense of dreaming and idealism without it being completely unrealistic!

Step 2:

Sum up your picture into a descriptive statement (about 12 words) which captures what you would like to see in the next 12 months in that area.

Step 3:

Translate your vision statement into actionable, practical, measurable steps. Good questions to ask:

- How will we achieve this?
- What are the specific details/dates?
- How will we measure? By when?
- Who will action this?
- Try and be as specific as possible.

Step 4:

- Review, reflect, revise
- Identify the snakes and ladders
- Make time to chat about how you are doing (you decide how often).

“The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways... a prudent man gives thought to his steps.”
(Proverbs 14: 8,15)

Another approach:

- **Dream :**

What could be true and what should be true for your marriage? Your finances? Your work? What do you want it to look like and feel like now and into the future

- **Describe :**

Define, describe, prioritize and bring it into clearer vision. Write it down.

- **Action:**

How do you want it to function? Anything that moves you towards it – yes, and whatever moves you away from it is a no

CHAPTER 9:

DEALING WITH THE PAST

The past has the capacity to creep up on us and it can cause pain and frustration in relationships. It's convenient to forget about it, but not always wise to forget about it.

Only the two of you can determine whether the past is dealt with. One of the signs that a past is well dealt with is that it is known, understood and forgiven.

With regard to understanding – it's important that a couple understands where the hang ups and the hurts have come from and how they have been dealt with for the health of the relationship. In the areas of trust, we need to make sure we have dealt with the potential areas of mistrust, hurt and fears that come along with an un-dealt with past. We have found that the past can rear its ugly head if not dealt with and put in its place.

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH THE PAST WHEN IT REARS ITS HEAD?

When we think of our past it is important to realize that it includes all hurts, hang ups and habits that will shape and effect the way that we relate to one another in marriage.

Examples:

- Past relationships (physical and emotional soul ties). We are not saying past partners are evil - we just acknowledge the ties that may remain.
- Hurts – e.g. failed dreams, parents
- Shame – something you did or something done to you.
- Habits – e.g. your way of handling conflict
- Personal things – things you bring in to the relationship as an individual
- Interpersonal things – things we've done during the relationship

There are many different kinds of hurts and we need to understand that many of them will affect the way we relate to and trust one another.

What do we do with some of that stuff?

Firstly, verbalise. Communicate it! And don't be unrealistic. Some things can't be dealt with in a 20 minute conversation; certain things take time, understanding and a regaining of trust. (The major guideline I'd give when sharing secrets and past sins with each other is not to go into graphic detail, especially if it regards sexual sin. It is terribly damaging to describe in vivid detail something that the other person will then be sentenced to replay in their imagination with painful vividness.)

Then actively communicate your transformation and actively forgive. Build up a faithful track record: there are things that can't be fixed in a conversation. Most forgiveness will start with verbal communication and will end with you needing to actively demonstrate it .

And be reminded that marriage is a relationship that is based on GRACE, trust and believing the best of one another. If there is an inability to forgive one another this will be the beginning of a long and difficult relationship.

Although it is difficult to talk about these things, it is essential to the health of any relationship.

Here is the difficult part: YOU go first, you forgive first. Be the first to forgive, as fast as you can, not just verbally, but actively and on-goingly.

What helps us to put the past in its place?

1) Forgiveness from God

Receive your own forgiveness. Some of the hurts that have been created need to be taken to Jesus so that we can get his forgiveness. There is no point going to another person for forgiveness if we haven't gone to Him for it. The deepest need of our heart is to be accepted and marriage is a small version of this being worked out. However, there is no way that your spouse can provide the total and complete acceptance and forgiveness that the human heart desires - this only comes from God.

2) Forgive yourself

We may have done things in the past that potentially damage our relationship today (e.g. being sexually active with other people). Christ is ready to forgive us. Receive eternal forgiveness as you trust in Christ and experience this forgiveness in your heart as we come clean with Christ and others (1 John 1:9).

3) Forgive your partner

Because of this incredible forgiveness that we have from God through Christ, we are able to forgive each other. We have a new grace for each other because of the huge grace that we have been given. A point of caution here: don't offer forgiveness to point out a fault or issue! Don't pretend to be noble and point out an issue by offering forgiveness- "I forgive you for never ever washing the dishes"

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND DISCUSS...

- What really struck you in this session?
- What are some things you would like to leave behind/ let go of as you move into this marriage?
- Is there any forgiveness of others that still needs to happen?
- Is there anything you still need to ask God's forgiveness for?
- Is there anything you still need to forgive yourself for?

Julie's Story

Before Terran and I had even started dating, I knew that he had been in a sexual relationship before he became a Christian. I suppose that comes with the territory of dating a very self-disclosing preacher! I thought I was fine about it. But 6 months into our relationship, I wasn't expecting the reality of his past to hit me so hard. As I grew to love Terran and as our relationship deepened, I began to really grieve what we had lost. I felt sad and a bit betrayed I suppose that Terran had shared such a sacred thing with someone else.

I think these feelings are natural – and perhaps even healthy – as the reality of sin and its far-reaching consequences (in this case, over a decade later) hit us. Terran also felt remorseful and full of regret, but was careful to affirm that he had been forgiven and made new.

This fact is the final reality. And it took me a while to grasp it. Though Terran had sinned

sexually long ago, he had been forgiven by God. His past no longer defined him. He was free, indeed! How terrible that we sometimes feel the right to hold onto things that God has long let go of. How self-righteous to think that we have the right to withhold forgiveness when Christ has freely given it to us.

If you find yourself in a similar position to me, may I urge you to forgive freely – just as you have been forgiven. And just as Christ separates us from our sin – as far as the east is from the west, make a commitment to separate your partner from their past. Don't bring it up, don't allude to it and don't subtly withhold your love or affection because of it. It may be hard at first, but both Terran and I have discovered such freedom in this regard – freedom from insecurities, bitterness and shame.

Matthew 10:8 Freely you have been given, so freely give.

CHAPTER 10:

ROMANCE & LOVE LANGUAGES

INTRODUCTION

Romance in a marriage is essential. Too often we get confused with culture's definition of romance – we can see it as chocolates, roses and candles; something with the “mush” factor; or a grand, over the top gesture. And some people simply say, “Well, I’m not romantic. That’s the way I was when you met me and you’ll just have to accept it. Romance is a nice to have in a relationship but not really essential. ”

We'd like to suggest that romance is all about knowing your spouse specifically so you can love them intimately. The level of intimacy you have with your spouse is unique. Think about the fact that you are the only legitimate source of romance for your spouse. Romance enables you to celebrate and nurture the unique oneness of your marriage relationship. We tend to gravitate towards the place or person where we feel known and loved. We want that person to be our spouse.

We are all unique so what is romantic to me will be different to what you consider to be romantic. The purpose of romance is simply to make your spouse feel loved, special, valued and important. It is a personal and unique way of saying: “I love you. I love being married to you.” A romantic action is meant to show how much you love and appreciate your spouse. For some it comes naturally, and it is easy to be creative and spontaneous. For others, it requires more careful planning and effort. But it is simply a way to express and show that your relationship is a top priority.

The danger is that often being romantic is a top priority during dating, but can fade away during marriage if you allow routine and laziness to creep in. Another challenge is that what speaks romance today may not speak romance tomorrow. Our romantic needs change. But how wonderful to be a life-long student of your partner!

The next section will show how we can learn to know our individual partners intimately so that we can express love and romance in a way that is meaningful to them.

IN LOVE OR REAL LOVE?

Have you ever felt that ‘weak in the knees’, euphoric, obsessed with the other, ‘in love’ feeling? Do you still feel like that? This ‘in love’ feeling involves no sacrifice, there is no choice involved to loving the other and there is no genuine interest in fostering love of the other.

Usually after that euphoria dies, you have 3 options. You can either:

- Jump Ship. (Statistics show – 40% of first marriages fail, 60% of second marriages fail and 75% of third marriages fail).
- Live in misery, OR
- Make a choice to love your partner by filling their love tank.

Just like a car doesn't work if its oil tank is not filled, so a relationship does not work if the love tank is not filled. (Gary Chapman)

Real love compared to having that 'in love' feeling involves sacrifice, it involves a conscious choice / an act of the will and it takes effort and discipline. In this chapter, we are going to explore the art of communicating love. All too often we express our love to others in the way that we think is meaningful because it is the way that we ourselves love to be loved.

However, this expression of love does not always work for the other person. By understanding each other's 'love language', you will become more skilled in loving each other in a way that actually makes your partner feel loved.

We will begin to answer the questions:

- What does loving someone really look like?
- How can we be assured that our love is actually being felt by the other person?

THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

(These concepts taken from the book *The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* by Gary Chapman)

There are 5 primary love languages in which you can express love to your partner and through which you like to receive love.

Gift giving

You will feel especially loved when you receive a gift, or a card. Also, you will tend to express your love by giving things to others. These gifts can be small or big; the importance is the thought and care that is put into the gift which expresses love.

The following are examples of this:

- Birthdays are big,
- Surprise under a pillow
- Chocolate and a note in a work suitcase
- The gift of being present (as yourself!)

Words of affirmation

If your love language is words of encouragement, it means you feel loved when someone speaks words of encouragement to you. You will also tend to think that others feel loved when you speak words of encouragement to them.

The following are examples of this:

- Well Done- Encouraging words
- Kind Words
- Humble Words- Requests not demands
- Thanks for making dinner- Appreciation
- You look great- Compliment

Some ideas of how to do this: notes left on the fridge or around the house, sms/ call your partner often, make an effort on special occasions to write or say your feelings with birthday cards etc.

Quality time

You will feel loved by a person spending time with you, and listening attentively to you. It is not really just watching the TV together, but rather about investing yourself in the other person and giving them your full attention. It includes both shoulder to shoulder activities (e.g. playing putt- putt, a walk on the beach, bowling) and face to face moments (e.g. meaningful conversation without distraction.)

The following are examples of this:

- Togetherness
- Quality Conversation
- Real Listening
- Observe Body Language (maintain eye contact)
- Don't interrupt
- Beach, Movies, Dinner NOT with a whole bunch of people.

Acts of service/ helping

If this is your love language, you feel loved when someone does an act of kindness for you, such as tidying the house or doing a job for you. Conversely, you will feel unloved and let down if someone does not complete a job for you. This love language involves thought and action, the motivation for this help is out of a place of love and service towards your spouse. Often this can be downplayed as simply doing the chores. The challenge is to not let these moments go by unnoticed, but to acknowledge and show appreciation for them.

The following are examples of this:

- Making dinner
- Washing the dishes
- Making the bed
- Offering your bakkie to help someone moving

Physical touch

You will feel loved through holding hands, hugging, standing close and so on. This love language is not primarily about sexual fulfilment, rather physical affection. This is a sensory and tactile love language; touch tends to make you feel secure, loved and connected to your spouse.

The following are examples of this:

- Hugs
- Holding Hands
- Making Love

Other thoughts

- Use all the love languages, but focus on the one's your partner naturally leans towards
- Remember that in different stages of your relationship your primary love language may change, so reassess every few years
- The way you receive love and the way you give love might be different; be conscious in the way you GIVE love to your spouse, don't just fall back on what comes easily to you.
- Love languages are a tool to help you love your partner specifically and intentionally which should lead to your partner flourishing as they feel heard and connected to you. We can bring out the best in our partners in the way we love them!

FINAL THOUGHT

There will be times in your relationship that you feel that your partner disappoints you by not being able to love you in the way that you need. Remember, we are only human after all and our partners cannot fulfil us in every way all the time. God loves you infinitely more than your partner ever could. Look to God for love and fulfilment. He will not disappoint you or let you down. This will take pressure off your spouse fulfilling your needs completely as they will be met by God. This will in turn help you to love your partner better.

CONCLUSION

God's definition of love is challenging and inspiring. We will do well to strive for this in relationships in general and marriage in particular.

1 Corinthians 13: 1-10

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love I am NOTHING. If I give all positions to the poor and surrender my body to the flames but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never failsand now these 3 remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. [Emphasis added]

HOMework

List 2 ways you can show love to your partner this month now that you have discovered how they like to be loved.

- Don't communicate it now to your partner
- Reveal to your partner once you act this out
- Make sure you follow through with this
- Share a highlight of this with your mentors. It might seem strange, strained and unnatural loving in a different way but persevere because you will reap the benefits!

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS...

- On a scale of 1 – 10, how romantic were we when we started dating? How romantic are we now?
- Describe one of your "successful" attempts at romance. Does your partner agree that it was successful?
- What keeps you from being romantic more often?
- When has your partner made you feel loved because of their specific knowledge of you?
- What prevents you from knowing your partner's needs and desires?
- How can you begin to know your partner more specifically?

EXERCISE 1: DEFINING LOVE

Formulate your own definition of love by doing the following exercise:

This exercise will help you define love in your own terms and compare your definition with your partners.

Researcher Beverly Fear asked more than 170 people to rate the central features of love. The 12 most important attributes they identified are listed below.

Take a moment to prioritise this list for yourself...

- acceptance
- caring
- commitment
- concern for others' well-being
- friendship
- honesty
- interest in others
- loyalty
- respect
- supportiveness
- trust
- wanting to be with the other

Next circle your top three attributes of love and write a definition of love that incorporates them.

Love is.....

Now compare your priorities and your definition with your future spouse to see what differences, if any, you might have with defining love. Remember, your definition of love could change over the years as you enter different seasons of life.

EXERCISE 2:

DISCOVER YOUR LOVE LANGUAGE AND THE LOVE LANGUAGE OF YOUR FUTURE SPOUSE

(Exercise taken from the God First Church marriage preparation manual)

Rate the sentences 1 to 5 according to what would make you feel most appreciated and loved by your future spouse (FS).

5 represents what you most appreciate and 1 represents what you least appreciate in each group. No individual grouping can have a number repeated.

GROUP ONE

- A Your FS says, "You did a great job on that. I appreciate it."
- B Your FS unexpectedly fixes something of yours that is broken
- C Your FS brings you a treat from the shop
- D Your FS invites you to go on a leisurely walk just to chat
- E Your FS makes a point of hugging you before you leave the house

GROUP TWO

- A ___ Your FS tells you how much he/she appreciates you
- B ___ Your FS volunteers to do the dishes telling you to relax
- C ___ Your FS brings you flowers / chocolates, just because they care
- D ___ Your FS invites you to sit down and talk about your day
- E ___ Your FS often tousles your hair

GROUP THREE

- A ___ Your FS tells others about a recent success you had
- B ___ Your FS cleans out your car
- C ___ Your FS surprises you with an unexpected gift
- D ___ Your FS surprises you with a special afternoon trip somewhere
- E ___ Your FS holds your hand as you walk around the shops

GROUP FOUR

- A ___ Your FS praises you about one of your special qualities
- B ___ Your FS makes lunch for you
- C ___ Your FS surprises you by buying you your favourite magazine
- D ___ Your FS plans a special night out for the two of you
- E ___ Your FS often stands by your side with their arm around you

GROUP FIVE

- A ___ Your FS tells you how much his or her friends appreciate you
- B ___ Your FS fills out your tedious tax return for you
- C ___ Your FS sends you something special through the mail
- D ___ Your FS unexpectedly kidnaps you for lunch
- E ___ Your FS is physically affectionate to you in public

	ENCOURAGING WORDS	ACTS OF SERVICE	GIFT GIVING	QUALITY TIME	TOUCH
GROUP 1	A	B	C	D	E
GROUP 2	A	B	C	D	E
GROUP 3	A	B	C	D	E
GROUP 4	A	B	C	D	E
GROUP 5	A	B	C	D	E
TOTALS					

- Do you agree with the top two as being your primary love languages?
- Which ways have you been expressing love to your partner?
- How can you better love your partner in line with their primary love languages?

Remember: Even though a love language is 5th on your list, you may still occasionally feel loved by this language.

EXERCISE 3:

APPRECIATING OUR DIFFERENCES

(Exercise taken from the God First Church marriage preparation manual)

Separately, please complete the questionnaire below. Mark the line with your own preferences first, then add your partners at the end. Place initials on the line at the point that you feel represents how you both are.
Example: (C = Craig, J = Janet)

Relaxation	Go Out	CJ	Stay In
Planning	Stick to plan	J C	Be Spontaneous
Relaxation	Go Out		Stay In
Planning	Stick to plan		Be Spontaneous
Clothes	Casual		Formal
Disagreements	Thrash it out		Keep the peace
Holidays	Seek adventure		Seek rest
Money	Spend		Save
People	Time with others		Time Alone
Punctuality	Have time in hand		Cut it fine
Sleeping	Go to bed early		Go to bed late
Sport	Enthusiast		Uninterested
Tidiness	Tidy		Untidy
Telephone	Talk at length		Talk Briefly
TV	Watch a lot		Watch a little
Other			

Now share your answers with each other.

- Are there any surprises?
- Discuss how these differences can be used for good in a relationship and also consider where there may be weakness in the relationship if you are too different or too similar in some areas.

CHAPTER 11:

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

PRE-ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS...

These are some helpful questions before considering engagement. Take some time out to really ponder them properly...

QUESTIONS ABOUT COMPATIBILITY:

Is there a spark between you:

- Physically?
- Intellectually?
- Emotionally?
- Spiritually?
- In terms of having fun together?
- What are the things you have in common?
- Are you best friends?

Do you disagree on any of these key issues:

- What you want to do with your lives?
- Where you want to live?
- Spiritual values.
- Having kids (when and how many).
- Financial approach to life.
- Expected roles of what the man should do and what the woman should do.
- The role of each other's families in the marriage.

QUESTIONS THAT RELATE TO GOD (THESE ASSUME YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN):

- Do you believe God is calling you to this relationship? If so, what makes you sure?
- Is God at the centre at your relationship? If so, what are the choices you have made that reflect that decision?
- If you are involved in a church, in what ways can your marriage benefit the church?
- If you're a Christian, have you pursued sexual abstinence until marriage? If you haven't, are you willing to repent and wait? If you aspire to abstinence but feel overwhelmed by sexual attraction, are you willing to get help from mature Christians?

QUESTIONS THAT RELATE TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF OTHERS:

- What do your closest friends and family feel about you being together? What have they said?
- Who are the wise spiritual people who you have sought perspective and accountability from?
- In what ways will marriage be good for you into the future?
- In what ways will marriage to this person help you fulfill your life's purpose?
- Do you understand that marriage means putting each other before anyone else, especially family members that have a big influence on our lives? Are you willing to do that?
- Are you aware of what each other's families are like – and are you willing to put up with it for life?
- Do you build your relationship towards community or to isolation?

QUESTIONS ABOUT PROBLEM ISSUES IN OUR LIVES:

- What is your relationship history? Are there any patterns of relating in the past that have been negative?
- Do either of you have any emotional baggage, or residue soul-ties, from previous relationships?
- What is the relational history of your parents? And, if there are negatives, what have you done to be set free of the pattern of relating they have modelled to you?

QUESTIONS ABOUT REALLY KNOWING EACH OTHER:

- Are there any areas in your partner's life that you are hoping will change once you get married?
- Are you aware of each other's weaknesses, temptations, and bad habits? If so, what are they? And are you willing to live with them even if they do not change?
- How do you typically act toward each other in times of conflict? And how do you usually resolve conflict?
- Are there any secrets you are keeping from each other?
- Do you regularly share your innermost thoughts with each other?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STRENGTH OF YOUR COMMITMENT:

- Do either of you feel pressurized in any way into getting married?
- What tests/trials has your relationship been through?
- Are you ready to say: "I commit my life to you, through thick and thin, I will do everything I can to be a blessing to you in every way for the rest of our lives."
- If supporting factors (like health, common friends, hobbies, financial security, physical attractiveness of the other person, the romantic intensity between you) left, would you still be willing to stay married? In other words, are there any conditions to keeping your marriage commitment to each other? What are they?
- Is your relationship based on 'being in love' or on 'choosing to love'? What is the difference between these two kinds of love, and which is a marriage to be built on?
- Complete the sentence, 'Divorce is an acceptable option if ...'

The ten C's of compatibility

An excerpt from the Friends First "Sex in the City" series.

Every now and then God speaks to two people and lets them know that he intends for them to be marriage partners. Wow. That happened in the Old Testament, and it happens today. It must be amazing to have that kind of clarity. But for most of us, this is not God's normal pattern at all! In 1 Corinthians 7:39 people are told that they can marry whoever they choose, provided they are in the Lord. Most times, God doesn't choose for us – we choose. Think about that. God wants us to choose. And if we have the least bit of sanity about us – just think of the high divorce rates – we'll need to choose someone wisely. We need to choose someone who will be compatible with us. Strong emotions are not the best guide for choosing someone. If we learn anything from the many people who've experienced the devastation of choosing the wrong person it's this: use your head, not just your heart, before starting a relationship.

Here are ten questions to ask yourself before you make a move on anyone. If you cannot answer YES to all ten questions, then don't make any move at all.

- **Character** – Have I known this person long enough to see if I can really trust and respect them?
- **Cooperation** – Is this person able to communicate, to function in team and community, and to deal with conflict?
- **Chemistry** – Am I attracted to this person physically and emotionally?
- **Commonness** – Can I relate to this person on the grounds of common interests and backgrounds?
- **Closeness to God** – Does this person consistently love and surrender to God?
- **Compass** – Does this person have similar values and similar life-direction to me?
- **Clock** – Is this person personally and circumstantially ready for a relationship?
- **Counsel** – What do godly leaders and friends in my life think about me pursuing this person?
- **Calm** – Beneath any strong emotions I have, is there a settled peace in my heart about starting this relationship?
- **Cupboard** – Has this person dealt with the emotional baggage of past relationships?

Obviously, some of the Cs are more important than others. And all of them imply that you have first gotten to know them as friends, before you make a move. And they also imply that you never fall in love with a person's potential (e.g. 'One day they could have amazing character') but with who the person actually is right now.

The ten C's of getting ready

Singleness is a blessing and an opportunity. Jesus, and the apostle Paul, beautifully show us this. But for most of us, we will ultimately marry. And we better be getting ready beforehand. Even if the person never arrives, we won't be sorry for the positive impact this kind of preparation has on our lives.

The ten Cs provide some good tips for getting ready. Until you can answer YES to all ten Cs you probably are not ready to start a relationship...

- **Character** – Am I growing in godliness and integrity?
- **Cooperation** – Am I emotionally whole and skilled in relating to people, and living life in community?
- **Chemistry** – Am I nurturing my personal hygiene and attractiveness?
- **Commonness** – Am I growing in personal interests?
- **Closeness to God** – Am I developing a growing intimacy with God?
- **Compass** – Do I have a growing sense of what God has called me to do with my life, and what some of my life-direction may look like?
- **Clock** – Am I personally circumstantially ready for marriage in the next two to four years?
- **Counsel** – Am I accountable to godly friends and leaders, seeking their perspective especially when making big decisions?
- **Calm** – Am I cultivating a habit of seeking and hearing God's voice in the gentle inner whispers, especially a sense of his endorsing peace on my decisions?
- **Cupboard** – Have I dealt with the emotional baggage of past relationships?

There's a saying: if you want to marry a princess, then make sure you are a prince. The opposite is also true: if you want to marry a prince, then make sure you are a princess.

How to have a God-pleasing marriage according to Ephesians 5:21-33

We are not making progress in godliness if we have not considered how it impacts our marriages. No talk about godliness is complete without talking about how it impacts our daily relationships.

Ephesians 4-6 speaks about applying the Gospel to our lives in godliness. 4:17-24 speaks about godliness generally and 4:25-5:7 speaks of it more specifically. Then he speaks about godliness in terms of light, wisdom and life in the Spirit (5:8-21) – the last verse being a reference to ‘submitting to each other’. But now he starts to speak of how godliness involves relating skilfully to people close to us: husbands, wives, children, parents, workers, employers... The best thing we can do for our marriages is to root them in a vital Christian community.

The life experienced in our Christian gatherings should flow into our daily relationships. In 5:18-21 we have seen what a Spirit-filled Christian gathering looks like, but then amazingly Paul, without even (in the Greek) using a full-stop he shifts into the marriage relationship (5:22 onwards). In other words, great church meetings should result in great marriages! Its absurd to think that we can submit to the Spirit when gathered as Christians but then not submit to the Spirit once we are dispersed.

A marriage is first and foremost a team

The basic principle of all relationships – whether husbands and wives, children and parents, workers and employers - is a willingness to team together. Verse 21 (which says ‘submit to one another’ out of reverence for Christ) reminds us that as we all live in the Spirit, a kind of mutual submission flows through all of our relationships. This means a commitment to respect each other, to get on with each other, to play on the same team. It implies an equality of status before God, even if there are different roles.

This is not the last thing that needs to be said, but it is the first thing – Paul is about to explain that not only are we to team, but there is such a thing as God-given authority, or leadership patterns in all these relationships. But before he gets to these leadership patterns, he wants to ensure that, especially amongst Christians, leaders lead someone they have respectful relationship with, and followers follow someone they have a respectful relationship with. One may be a captain of the other, but they are still on the same team. And this is, as we have seen in verses 19-20, meant to be a joy-filled team. But, Paul now begins to speak of roles and leadership patterns within these relationships...

22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

The exercise of authority (i.e. leadership) and submission (i.e. followership) within a Christian marriage should be shaped by the glorious truths and experience of the Gospel.

In these verses Paul tells wives to submit and husbands to be heads. BUT, and this is very important, this is not where the emphasis is. He is not trying to persuade people to submit, and to lead – he assumes that generally people, especially in his day, do understand that the husband is leader. Rather

than trying to persuade them to lead / follow he is trying to shape the very way that they lead / follow – by helping them to see their relationship in a whole new way, a way informed by the Gospel. Wives are to submit to their husbands as a way of expressing security in, and worship to Jesus.

The phrase ‘as you do to the Lord’ (v22) should be translated ‘as something you do for the Lord’. It echoes the prior thought of submitting to each other ‘out of reverence for Christ’ (v21). This implies that she finds great joy and security in her direct relationship with Christ, who is her Saviour and her Head, and that, from that well-spring, is ready to entrust her life to her husband’s leadership.

It must be remembered that these verses connect directly to the instruction to ‘be filled with the Spirit.’ Only a Spirit-filled wife can truly submit to her husband in the way described here. If we are not controlled by the Spirit, our sinful tendencies to selfassertion, self-promotion, and rebellious independence will get in the way.

A wife’s submission does not imply either inequality nor suppressed contribution

The metaphor of body to head is powerful in that it does not imply inequality or suppressed contribution. The wife is in no way inferior. She is not less human. She is not less Christian. She is no less access to the Spirit. She does not have less gifting or intelligence. The picture of a body and a head is one of interdependence, where one cannot exist nor thrive without the other. It is a picture of team-work.

Husbands need to lead their wives in a cherishing way, not in a domineering way. Let’s explore that simple metaphor: Christ is head of the church, his body. What else has Paul already said of this in this letter? Paul speaks of Christ’s headship in two ways:

Christ is confrontational head over all his rivals

This is the emphasis in 1:19-21 where it speaks of Christ conquering death, and having authority over all competing powers, dominions, rules and authorities. Now, when Paul speaks about husband as head of the wife, he is not referring to this kind of confrontational authority over a rival. That is not how a husband leads.

Christ is benevolent head of his church

This is the emphasis of 1:22,23 which says that ‘Christ is head over everything (ie over competing rivals) for the benefit of the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all things in every way.’

These verses tell us how Jesus relates to the church: Firstly, we see that his authority exists for her benefit. And all that he has accomplished, and all his strength is so that she will succeed and become all she can become. Secondly, we see that he is profoundly interconnected with, and interdependent on her, like a head is with a body. He has chosen to team with her, and to live life together as one.

So, when a husband is head over his wife it does not mean he exercises a confrontational authority over her as a rival, but rather that he exercises a benevolent authority, where he gives his life for her benefit, where all his strength and success in other areas of life is channelled into her security, her growth, her

benefit, her wholeness; where he is profoundly interconnected with her, and where they live life together as a team, and as one.

It is the wife's responsibility to be ready to follow with the right spirit

Verses 22-24 are written to wives, not to husbands. That is what God is wanting to say to wives not husbands. In other words, the cry of a wife's heart should be, 'Husband, we are a team, and you are the team-leader. I am ready to follow your captaincy. Lead me into our good.' This should come from the wife, not be insisted on by the husband. A wife's submission to her husband is a commitment to respect and trust and support her husband's leadership. 'For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.' Paul uses two interwoven analogies for this submission:

1) The submission of the church to Christ: the church chooses to respect and trust and support Christ's leadership. Similarly, the wife chooses to submit to her husband.

2) The submission of the body to the head: imagine a body that did not choose to trust and respect and support the head. Similarly, the wife chooses to submit to her husband.

Interestingly, there is a way a wife can follow which draws the leadership out of her husband, who through fear or laziness is not leading. She must find this way with God's wisdom. Sadly, many women, experiencing a leadership vacuum because of their husbands laziness or fear, begin to lead. But a better option is to do all you can to try draw his leadership out of him.

The phrase 'in everything' (vs 24) speaks of a whole-hearted willingness to follow. Obviously, it does not mean that every single decision you make needs to be greenlighted by the husband, but it does mean a readiness to seek the husband's counsel in all major decisions.

Every married couple needs to work out for themselves how they practically work out in their daily lives these two truths: 1) the couple is to be a team, and 2) the husband is to be the team-leader of the team.

First and foremost, they both need to seek to be a team

This simple truth that a couple is a team has radical implications. And every couple needs to work those implications out for themselves. Some of the implications may be:

- Having a joint-bank account.
- Learning to minister together.
- Refusing to compete with each other.
- Praying together several times a week.
- Discerning the call on the marriage, not just on the individual lives.
- Deferring at times to the other person's areas of gifting and competency.
- Talking to each other before making decisions that impact upon both lives.

But over and above the concept of teaming, the husband is the servant-teamleader

Again, each couple needs to work out the implications of this. Some possible implications of this are:

If in a dangerous situation, the husband is ready to give his life to save his wife's – and not the other way around. Wives are not meant to die so their husbands will live, but rather husbands are meant to be willing to die so their wives live.

The husband carries the burden for providing for and protecting the wife (and the kids for that matter). This does not mean that he alone needs to generate an income, but that it is he, not her that carries the burden of this. If there is going to be financial difficulty, he should be the first to see it coming, not her. And he should be initiating some solutions. Similarly, he not her, carries the burden of the physical security of the family.

The husband is, generally, first up in the morning to seek God and cover his wife and family in prayer, and last to bed to make sure all are safe. The husband keeps on proactively directing the team towards passion for God, towards involvement in church, and towards the fulfilling God's call on the couple. Although the wife shares the same pro-activity and eagerness, there is something wrong when she keeps on having to encourage him to pray, to read the Word, to get involved in church and to fulfil the call on the marriage.

In a very difficult decision that requires immediate decision-making the husband, after listening intently to his wife, makes the final decision – and the decision is based not on what is preferable for himself, but on what is best for both. And always the best way to make the decision is through reaching consensus, but if this is not possible and a decision must be made, then the husband makes the call, and the wife should freshly entrust herself to the husband's decision.

The husband does all he can to find the strength, the courage, and the wisdom he needs to lead this team. He does this through seeking God and through seeking mentoring from other seasoned, Christ-like married men.

A wife, however, does not need to follow her husband when he tries to lead her into sin. Her highest authority is God after all (see Acts 5:29). Although her husband is her head, he is not her Lord. Only Jesus is that to her.

What if a husband is not a Christian, or what if he is not very wise and sensitive in the way he leads? 1 Peter 3:1-6 speaks about this, but the answer is that, first and foremost she entrusts herself to Jesus, and then to her husband. Jesus calls her to follow her husband, and that's why she does it – not because the husband is deserving or easy to follow but out of her security in Christ. Her reward is Christ. However, on top of this, doing this makes it more likely for her husband to change for the good.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing [b] her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives Husbands need to become the kind of husbands who are a joy to follow.

Verses 22-24 have been directed to wives. Now these verses are directed to husbands. Imagine Paul just told wives to follow their husbands, but then did not tell husbands to be a joy to follow. But that would

be cruel – and he does not do that. In fact he only takes up three verses speaking to wives about the kind of wives they should be, but he spends eight verses speaking to men about the kind of husbands they should be.

Husbands need to, out of a growing experience of Christ's sacrificial love, to love their wives (v25). This love for his wife must be sacrificial. He must make it his highest priority, and must be willing to exert huge amounts of energy into loving his wife. He must regularly and routinely say no to some of his own desires and, letting go of them, give himself for her benefit. This love for his wife must aim at her holiness and her wholeness. Just like Jesus makes the church holy, and radiant, so the husband needs to keep at the fore of his mind the question, 'How can I help my wife become all God wants her to be – holy and whole?'

A wife will begin to shine when her husband loves her (v27). Christ gave himself up for his bride, the church – but in return he gets a radiant church.

In the same way, the love of a husband for a wife should bring out the best in her. She should come alive and deeply thrive in his love. Conversely, a wife can begin to shrivel up as a person when her life is dominated by the insecurity and misery of not being loved by her husband. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, people have never hated their own bodies, but they feed and care for them, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Husbands need to see their wives as extensions of their very selves (v28,29).

Paul has compared a husband and a wife to a head joined to a body. Which head would not nourish (or feed) and cherish (care) for its own body? Which head would neglect or destroy its own body? Similarly, husbands – as they realize that their wives are extensions of themselves – must not neglect or hurt their wives, but must do all they can to nourish and cherish them.

The marriage relationship is to be the closest of all relationships (v31). Paul quotes from Genesis 2:24. Paul switches from the one-flesh picture of a head and its body (which he has explored from v23-29), to the one-flesh picture of Adam and Eve, where Eve has been taken from his body, and who through marriage is in a sense reunited.

In Genesis 2:24 (quoted in v31) we see a few things about marriage: Marriage is the beginning of a new family unity. A man leaves his father and mother, and the fact that his family primary identity is them, and starts his own family.

Marriage calls for an intimacy shared that is to be closer than the intimacy shared between children and their parents. Marriage is the forsaking of all others – in other words bonding to, teaming with and loving one's partner becomes a higher priority than any other relationship. Marriage is about the forming of a new union – where the other person is an extension of yourself.

Marriage is a covenant that is to be celebrated and sealed through sexual intimacy. This is the meaning of 'one flesh'. This is why sex is for marriage alone. It is a life-uniting act that is meant to be enjoyed in the context of a life-uniting covenant of marriage. 32 This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Our marriages should be a picture of the Gospel to the people around us (v32). The quality of our marriages, and our profound capacities to respect, love and trust each other – this is meant to display

the love of Christ for his church to the world. To the degree that a church's marriages excel to that degree is its Gospel-impact in that area increased.

Marriage is one of the chief environments God uses to shape our lives toward Christlikeness. Marriage is profoundly mysterious (v32). Since marriage is meant to be a living metaphor of something else, it has many layers of meaning. Certainly, one layer of meaning is the one mentioned in verse 26 – that marriage is the environment God uses to sanctify us and make us more like Jesus. Becoming like Jesus is impossible in isolation, and it is impossible to meaningfully do in the context of superficial relationships. One of the ideal places for Christ to iron out of character flaws and teach us a robust Christ-like character is in the very close, very intensive relationship of marriage. To the degree we co-operate with Christ's sanctifying work to that degree will our marriage be a joy. There is nothing that can hurt a marriage like a stubborn refusal to change. And we don't change primarily because our spouse wants us to change, but rather because Jesus wants us to change.

A good starting point for a marriage is to meet the most basic need in the other person (v33). The most foundational need of a wife is love – which is why the husband needs to love his wife. Of course a wife needs respect, but statistics confirm that most women have an even more basic need for love. A loved wife will more likely be a happy wife.

The most foundational need of a husband is respect – which is why the wife needs to respect her husband. Of course a husband needs love, but statistics confirm that most men have an even more basic need for respect. A respected husband will more likely be a happy husband.

ADDENDUM 1

READINGS PAGE

Ephesians 5

1 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God...

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

Instructions for Christian Households

21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Sav-iour. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be unit-ed to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

"Being in love is a good thing, but it is not the best thing. It is a noble feeling, but it is still a feeling... no feeling can be relied on to last in its full intensity, or even to last at all. Knowledge can last, principles can last, habits can last, but feelings come and go. And in fact, whatever people say, the state called "being in love" usually does not last... But, of course, ceasing to be "in love" need not mean ceasing to love. Love in this second sense — love as distinct from "being in love" — is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced by (in Christian marriages) the grace which both partners ask, and receive, from God. They can have this love for each other even at those moments when they do not like each other; as you love yourself when you do not like yourself. They can retain this love even when each would easily, if they allowed themselves, be "in love" with someone else. "Being in love" first moved them to promise fidelity: this quieter love enables them to keep the promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the ex-plosion that started it."

- C.S Lewis

"The following is an extract from Louis de Bernieres' novel, "Captain Corelli's Mandolin". Pelagia's father talks to her about love:

"Love is a temporary madness, it erupts like volcanoes and then subsides. And when it subsides you have to make a decision. You have to work out whether your roots have so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part. Because that is what love is. Love is not breathlessness, it is not excitement, it is not the promulgation of promise of eternal passion, it is not the desire to mate every second minute of the day, it is not lying awake at night imagining that he is kissing every part of your body. No, don't blush, I am telling you some truths. That is just being "in love", which any fool can do. Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away, and this is both an art and a fortunate accident. Your mother and I had it, we had roots that grew towards each other underground, and when all the pretty blossom had fallen from our branches, we found that we were one tree and not two.

ADDENDUM 2

HERE'S THE BEST ADVICE FROM A SINGLE GUY WHO SPENT A YEAR INTERVIEWING COUPLES

MEGAN WILLETT FEB 14 2014

ADAPTED FROM [HTTP://WWW.BUSINESSINSIDER.COM.AU/NATE-BAGLEYS-BEST-RELATIONSHIP-ADVICE-2014-2](http://www.businessinsider.com.au/nate-bagleys-best-relationship-advice-2014-2)

Nate Bagley says he was sick of hearing love stories that fell into one of two categories — scandal and divorce, and unrealistic fairytale.

So he started a project, used his life savings to tour the country and interview couples in happy, long-term relationships. He then shared what he learned and posted podcasts of the couples' journeys and advice. "I've interviewed gay couples, straight couples, rich couples, poor couples, religious couples, atheist couples, couples who have been together for a short time, and couples who have been together for over 70 years. I've even interviewed couples in arranged marriages and polygamous couples."

This is some of the best advice that he shared:

On the key things that make a relationship successful:

This was actually one of the most surprising things I learned on the journey.

Self-Love: The happiest couples always consisted of two (sometimes more) emotionally healthy and independently happy individuals. These people practiced self-love. They treated themselves with the same type of care that they treated their partner... or at least they tried to.

Emotionally healthy people know how to forgive, they are able to acknowledge their part in any disagreement or conflict and take responsibility for it. They are self-aware enough to be assertive, to pull their weight, and to give love when it's most difficult.

Commitment: After that emotional health came an unquestioning level of commitment. The happiest couples knew that if things got hectic, their significant other wasn't going to walk out on them. They knew that even if things got hard — no, especially if things got hard — they were better off together. The sum of the parts is greater than the whole.

Trust: Happy couples trust each other... and they have earned each other's trust. They don't worry about the other person trying to undermine them or sabotage them, because they've proven over and over again that they are each other's biggest advocate. That trust is built through actions, not words. It's day after day after day of fidelity, service, emotional security, reliability.

Establish that foundation, and you're in good shape.

Intentionality: This is the icing on the cake. There's a difference between the couple who drives through the rainstorm and the couple who pulls their car to the side of the road to make out in the rain. (Yes, that's a true story.) There's a difference between the couple who kisses for 10 seconds or longer when they say goodbye to each other rather than just giving each other a peck... or nothing at all. There's a difference between the couples who encourage each other to pursue their personal goals at the

expense of their own discomfort or inconvenience... even if it means their partner has to stage kiss another woman.

The couples who try on a daily basis to experience some sort of meaningful connection, or create a fun memory are the couples who shattered my perception of what was possible in a loving relationship.”

On the best advice he was given:

One woman in Georgia gave some pretty amazing advice. She and her husband have been married for over 60 years, and after being asked what her best relationship advice would be, she paused and said... ‘Don’t be afraid to be the one who loves the most.’”

On the best way to solve disagreements:

Resolving disagreements was one of the topics that came up the most. Here’s what I learned:

Don’t Fight To Win: A huge number of couples talked about how they didn’t fight against each other. I mean, if you’re in love, you should be playing for the same team. Your goal should be to resolve the issue, not to emerge victorious over the love of your life... and let’s be honest, you just feel guilty when you win anyway.

Seek to Understand: If you’re having a hard time playing on the same team, stop fighting and instead try to understand why your partner is upset. Typically what’s being talked about isn’t the real issue. People are inherently bad at being vulnerable, especially in threatening situations. Be willing to ask sincere questions. Let the answers sink in. If she is complaining that you’re spending too much time at work, maybe the real issue is that she misses you, and wants to feel connected with you. Rather than arguing about how you’re providing for the family, and she needs to respect how hard you work, try to listen to what she’s really saying. Then hold her. Come home early one day, and surprise her with a date, or some special one-on-one time. Reassure her that she, and your relationship, are a priority for you. If you don’t want that same issue to arise again, keep investing in the solution.

Just Be Nice To Each Other Seriously. Don’t be a jerk. Don’t call names. Don’t take jabs. Don’t try to hurt the other person. Argue naked if it helps... but just be kind and civil and respectful. It will prevent so many bad things from happening.”

SESSION SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

Answer these three questions about each session:

- a) Biggest “take home” from this session?
- b) Things I / we need to come back to / questions I have?
- c) Any next steps / action items emerging?

COMMUNICATION

a)

b)

c)

GOD’S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

a)

b)

c)

MYTHS, DESIRES & EXPECTATIONS

a)

b)

c)

- a) Biggest “take home” from this session?
- b) Things I / we need to come back to / questions I have?
- c) Any next steps / action items emerging?

DEALING WITH CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE

- a)

- b)

- c)

LEAVING & CLEAVING

- a)

- b)

- c)

FINANCES

- a)

- b)

- c)

- a) Biggest “take home” from this session?
- b) Things I / we need to come back to / questions I have?
- c) Any next steps / action items emerging?

DEALING WITH THE PAST

- a)

- b)

- c)

SEX & INTIMACY

- a)

- b)

- c)

CREATING A VISION FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

- a)

- b)

- c)

- a) Biggest “take home” from this session?
- b) Things I / we need to come back to / questions I have?
- c) Any next steps / action items emerging?

ROMANCE & LOVE LANGUAGES

a)

b)

c)

“PARKING LOT”

Use this page to jot down any unfinished discussion topics/ thoughts you would like to come back to with your partner...