



# *Three Strands*

## **MARRIAGE WEEK**

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**FRI 07 FEB - FRI 14 FEB**

## **RESOURCE FOR COUPLES**

This resource has been put together as part of our marriage week celebration . It is meant to be used as a couples activity. Take time out of your schedule and enjoy doing the sessions together and learn more about each other and also your relationship.

We believe building a stronger connection is vital to any relationship. So we hope you find this information helpful and it enhances your marriage relationship as you engage with it.

# Three Strands

# MARRIAGE WEEK

*A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.*

**Ecclesiastes 4:12 NLT**

This year, as we seek God's blessing so that we can be a blessing to others, I pray and hope that your marriage will be enriched and encouraged. May you and your partner enjoy the best of God and life as you share your lives together.

The Bible offers a powerful insight into survival: the importance of building alliances. One person can be easily attacked and defeated. Two people are stronger, able to stand back-to-back and conquer. But three are even stronger, offering greater protection and support to one another.

This principle applies beautifully to marriage. A couple can be vulnerable on their own. Inviting family, friends, or a church community into their lives can significantly strengthen their bond. Furthermore, when a couple shares a faith in God and makes Him the center of their relationship, they become even more resilient, gaining wisdom, resources, and strength. This is why the scripture says,

***"a cord of three strands is not easily broken."***

Marriage is an intensely private relationship between two individuals, but for it to truly flourish, it needs the support of friends, family, and community. From a Christian perspective, we believe marriage was instituted by God as the foundation for human flourishing. When we invite God into our relationships, they can blossom into something truly fantastic, fruitful, and a real blessing to the community around us.

Our church community has celebrated Marriage Week for over ten years. I know some people struggle with the concept and choose not to participate. This makes me sad because Marriage Week isn't about judging or criticizing anyone's marriage. It's always been about enhancing, celebrating, resourcing, and helping our marriages grow.

I remember the initial challenge God gave us: "If most of you treated your cars the way you treat your marriage, most of your cars would be undrivable." We insure, MOT, service, tax, clean, lubricate, antifreeze, and wash our cars throughout the year. How much more should we care for our most valuable human relationship?

Over ten years later, I'm even more passionate about providing resources for marriages. From a church perspective, I want us to stand shoulder to shoulder with married couples and invite God to be the third strand in their cord, so that marriages continue to thrive in our community.

Please join us this year as we celebrate Marriage Week!

*Andrew Fadoju*

# *Flourishing Relationship*

This year, we will explore four aspects of a flourishing relationship, examining how the concept of the "three strands" applies to each. We'll also consider what we can learn and continue to learn in our marriages.

These four aspects are not exhaustive. You could most likely identify five, six, or even seven characteristics of a thriving relationship. However, I've chosen to focus on these four.

I believe these four aspects are attainable, practical, and reasonable for every couple.

*They are...*

***Appreciation***

***Quality time***

***Conflict resolution***

***Physical affection***

***A flourishing relationship is a dynamic and evolving relationship built on a strong foundation of mutual respect, love and commitment. It is characterised by a deep sense of intimacy, both emotional and physical where both partners feel seen, heard, and valued for who they are.***

# Appreciation

*"He is a wise person who does not grieve for the things which they have not, but rejoices for those which they have."*

— Epictetus

## JANE'S STORY

One of Jane's core life philosophies has always been "just do it." She believes that if you desire something and believe it's right and beneficial, you should simply pursue it. This approach has guided her in both her professional and personal life, and she struggles to understand why others hesitate.

She often feels that people who require constant praise for fulfilling their job, duties, or responsibilities are weak because they perpetually feel unappreciated due to a perceived lack of external validation.

Jane believes this reliance on external validation is a recipe for unhappiness. She firmly holds that deriving one's sense of well-being from others is a sure path to discontentment.

While these beliefs are deeply ingrained in Jane's thinking, she rarely discusses them with others and seldom allows her views to be challenged. If someone inquires about her perspective, she's likely to offer a non-specific response like, "It just makes sense, doesn't it?"

Those who know Jane often describe her as someone who "doesn't suffer fools gladly." You either align with her worldview or risk being excluded from her inner circle.

- **How do you think Jane will view appreciation?**

- **Do you think it is something she would be able to practice?**
- **How do you think Jane will respond to someone who appreciates her?**

## **Exploring Appreciation**

Couples in flourishing relationships consistently express appreciation for one another. While gratitude is an internal emotion, a feeling of thankfulness for what we have, appreciation is more outwardly focused. It involves recognizing and valuing the qualities and actions of others and actively communicating that recognition.

Appreciation often flows from a grateful heart.

For followers of Jesus Christ, gratitude is a core practice. They express thanks for their blessings and acknowledge God's role in their lives. Some people with no faith have also come to see gratitude as a vital component for successful relationships. They too, practice gratitude and thanksgiving in their relationships. In a marriage, gratitude for one's spouse should be a regular part of our prayers or thought process. If a couple struggles to thank God for their partner or cannot see the good in their partner, it may indicate an underlying issue that needs attention.

Gratitude is a reflection of our inner well-being and contentment with our circumstances.

When we cultivate gratitude, it naturally overflows into our interactions with others, including our family and friends. How we speak about our partners to others reveals the depth of our appreciation for them.

Since appreciation involves outward expression, it can be challenging for those who are not naturally expressive.

This is where the Christian concept of "dying to self" becomes particularly relevant. True appreciation is not about self-gratification; it's about focusing on the other person and communicating their value to them.

## **Appreciation Exercise**

- 1.** It's good to talk. Find a good time to tell your partner what they have done recently that you truly appreciate and let them know why.
- 2.** Now this might be hard for you to do but please give it a go. Tell your partner how you like to receive appreciation. Is it through words, actions, gifts, hugs, time or something else. Your partner is not meant to be a mind reader, so inform them
- 3.** Don't take each other for granted. How can you show your partner that you appreciate the everyday things that they do, even the mundane things. Go overboard and outdo each other with appreciation. See who can appreciate the other person more

# Quality Time

*"It's not about how much time you spend together, but how present you are when you do." Anon*

## **Ben's Story**

Ben always possessed a rebellious streak, constantly challenging conformity. Some perceived him as overly combative, blurring the lines between healthy dissent and unnecessary conflict.

One notion that particularly annoyed Ben was the stereotype that women are better at multitasking than men. While he rarely discussed this openly, he actively challenged it in his own life, often multitasking to prove the conventional wisdom wrong.

Unfortunately, Ben's friends and family experienced him quite differently. They consistently described him as distracted and unable to fully engage with anyone or anything.

His long-term girlfriend is accustomed to vying for his attention. She frequently reminded him, "Spending time with me or doing things together isn't a waste of time; it's valuable time we share."

Although Ben understood the sentiment, he often excused his behavior by claiming, "We just perceive time differently."

If asked to define his own perception of time, Ben would likely respond, "Time is to be utilized, not squandered."

- **How will you help Ben if you were a friend?**
- **Do you recognise any of Ben's attributes in yourself?**



- **What do you think of the quote "It's not about how much time you spend together, but how present you are when you do."?**

## **EXPLORING QUALITY TIME**

Our world is full of supposedly time-saving devices, but the real question is: What do we do with the time we're supposed to be saving? Who do we spend it with?

Time, as we know, cannot be saved. How we spend our time reflects our values. The Bible says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will also be." Time is a precious treasure, and how we invest it reveals what we truly value.

Studies on how couples spend time together and how that changes over time offer mixed results.

- **Early Stages:** Couples often spend significant time together in the early stages of a relationship, fueled by novelty and excitement.
- **Child-Rearing Years:** The arrival of children can significantly impact the amount of time couples spend together, often decreasing as parents focus on childcare.
- **Later Stages:** As children grow older and become more independent, couples may find they have more time together. However, competing demands like careers and other commitments can also influence these patterns.

There's a myth that it takes 21 days to form a habit. Research shows it often takes longer. One study found it took an average of 66 days for a new habit to become automatic; another showed 18 days, and others up to 254 days, depending on the complexity of the habit.

Appreciating our partner involves spending quality time with them, and forming those habits can and will take time.

## **QUALITY TIME EXERCISE**

1. What does "quality time" mean to you? What activities or experiences make you feel most connected to your partner?
2. Given the busyness of life in our modern world, how can you and your partner intentionally create more opportunities for quality time together? How can you prioritise this for each other?
3. If you and your partner had no restriction on your time and resources, what would an ideal night out or shared experience look like? What element of that outing or experience can you do in your current situation?

# Conflict Resolution

*"The quality of our lives depends not on whether or not we have conflicts, but on how we respond to them." - Thomas Crum*

## **Doug's Story**

Doug grew up in a household where his father reigned supreme. His father, convinced he possessed all the answers, frequently argued with the radio, once smashed the television for broadcasting "utter rubbish," and even lost jobs due to his confrontational nature with superiors he deemed "stiffs and planks."

Young Doug initially idolised his father, viewing him as a font of all knowledge. However, as he grew older and more observant, he began to notice his father's flaws: an inability to listen to others, a dismissal of reason in favour of his own beliefs, and a tendency to belittle opposing viewpoints.

Doug witnessed his mother endure years of his father's bullying, her valid opinions consistently dismissed and ridiculed.

By his late teens, the conflict between Doug and his father had become unbearable. Scientific facts were met with derision, common sense was ignored, and the father he once admired now appeared foolish in his eyes.

Determined to break this cycle, Doug vowed to avoid repeating his father's mistakes in his own family. He promised to be honest with himself, acknowledge his own limitations, and embrace learning as a continuous process. He vowed, "Never become Dad."

- **What will you say to Doug's father if you were his friend?**

- **Why do you think Doug's father had developed these tendencies?**
- **Do you think there is help for someone like him?**

## **EXPLORING CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Conflict is a normal part of any human relationship. If you ever meet a couple who claims they never argue, either they're both exceptionally saintly, or one or both of them are being less than honest.

Many small, seemingly irrelevant things can lead to conflict in interpersonal relationships. These disagreements simply highlight our uniqueness as individuals. I recall a friend who argued with his new wife about where to keep the ketchup. He'd grown up keeping it in the cupboard, while she stored it in the fridge. The discussion quickly escalated into "Are you saying my mom is wrong?"

Since conflict is normal, the Bible emphasizes the importance of conflict resolution within relationships. It teaches us to forgive one another, because unforgiveness breeds bitterness and hinders reconciliation.

Humility is also key, as pride often fuels conflict. The belief that "I'm right and have nothing to learn from my partner" prevents us from resolving disagreements. It might create a superficially peaceful environment, especially if the other person decides that peace at any cost is preferable to addressing the issue, but it doesn't resolve the underlying problem.

Communication is also essential. Many misunderstandings arise from a lack of clear communication. Good communication involves speaking the truth in love and respecting our partner's perspective, even when we disagree.

Ultimately, love is the best remedy for conflict. The Bible tells us that God demonstrated his great love for us when, while we were still sinners and far from him, Christ died for us. God, out of love, took the initiative to pursue reconciliation.

Expressing love for our partner, even during conflict, lays the foundation for healthy conflict resolution. It reassures them of our commitment, reminding them that while the conflict needs resolving, something far greater is at stake. Conflict resolution is vital because unattended conflict diminishes our ability to show appreciation and erodes our willingness to spend quality time together.

The Bible offers wise principles for navigating conflict:

"Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone." **Romans 12:18**

"Do not use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you." **Ephesians 4:29-32**

"Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." **Colossians 3:13**

"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires." **James 1:19-20**

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION EXERCISE**

1. Take time to discuss helpful things your partner does or say that helps you feel heard or understood? What are things that hinders resolution when there is conflict.
2. What are common triggers for conflict in your relationship? Do a compare and contrast to see if you are both on the same page? How can you address those triggers and minimise their impact?
3. After a conflict, what helps you feel ready to reconnect and move forward?

# *Physical Affection*

## **Jade's Story**

Whenever Jade shares her life story, she always emphasizes the power of physical touch. Those who know her well understand why she can sometimes be "touchy-feely." Behind those touches is someone who has experienced the incredible healing power of touch.

Jade grew up in a loving, caring, and what some might call a religious family. Her family was extremely supportive, open, and honest about their feelings, and her parents created a safe environment for Jade and her brother to grow, learn, and experience life.

At 18, Jade left for university a confident, self-aware young woman. During her first year, she met Dale, and they soon began dating. Although she subconsciously recognized some warning signs, she lacked the experience to heed them.

No matter how thoughtful she tried to be, Dale had a knack for mocking or belittling her efforts, both in front of friends and in private. He mocked her weekly calls home and teased her about being a "daddy's girl" because of her close relationship with her father.

By the end of her first year, Jade was a shadow of her former self. Her family and friends from home noticed the change. During the summer holidays, Dale visited, and everything came to a head. He was rude to Jade's mother and brother, and by the time her father arrived home from work, the tension was palpable.

During dinner, Jade's father, meeting Dale for the first time, tried to engage him in conversation but encountered the same rudeness. Seeing his daughter wilting before his eyes, he did what any good father would do. He stopped the meal, ordered Dale to his feet, and marched him out of the house. But before Dale left,

Jade's father turned to his daughter and asked, "What do you want me to do with this boy?" deliberately calling him a "boy" rather than a "man."

Suddenly, a strength that had long eluded her surged through her. Seeing the protective look in her father's eyes, she controlled herself, even though every fiber of her being wanted to unleash harsh words. She simply said, "Will you kindly kick him out, please? He is not welcome here or in my life."

Before Dale could respond, Jade's father ushered him out of the house with a gentle warning about the consequences of going near his daughter. And with that, Dale was gone.

As Jade's father walked back into the house, he saw the tears in her eyes. He sat beside her, hugged her, and soon the rest of the family joined in, hugging, crying, and laughing together.

For Jade, the fog lifted almost immediately. The loving touch from her family restored the strength that had been stolen from her. Throughout the rest of the summer holiday, she would recall that family embrace, especially her father's, and feel the healing warmth it brought to her soul.

So, while people might call her "touchy-feely," Jade knows the power of a loving embrace and the difference it can make.

- **How did Jade's story make you feel?**
- **How will you have responded if you were Jade's brother or sister?**
- **Why can physical touch both negative and positive had a huge impact on our wellbeing**



## **EXPLORING PHYSICAL AFFECTION**

Physical affection is incredibly important to human beings, both physically and emotionally. Lots of research by modern science tells us the benefits of touch, and whilst the Christian bible doesn't give us scientific details about physical touch, it gives us enough clues to show its importance.

When the warring sons of Isaac finally came face to face with each other, after a past filled with scheming, fears and suspicion. Esau runs to meet his brother Jacob and throws his arms around his neck and kisses him. This was a sign of reconciliation and forgiveness.

In Jesus' New Testament story of the prodigal son, we are told that on his way back home, having squandered his inheritance. His father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran and threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The lady with the issue of blood in the gospel's said to herself, 'if I only touch his garment, I will be made well'. She touched Jesus, he felt her touch and she experienced healing power in her body.

Throughout the Old Testament, people laid hands on each other to confer blessing. In the New Testament we are told to lay hands on the sick so they can feel human, valued and healed.

Princess Diana famously touched an AIDS patient and the story went worldwide especially at a time when people with AIDS were treated as outcasts.

Scientific research shows that physical touch, like hugging, cuddling, triggers the release of oxytocin. This chemical is sometimes called the 'love hormone' because it promotes feelings of bonding, trust and well being. It is also known to lower the stress hormone like cortisol.

At an emotional level, physical affection creates feelings of safety, feelings of being loved and builds connection to others. It reinforces our sense of belonging and reduces feelings of loneliness.

One of the joys of marriage is when we feel appreciated and are given time to be heard, loved and cared for. When we deal with conflicts that arise because they are inevitable, physical touch becomes a natural part of our relationship and we reap the rewards of that as it strengthens our relationship with our partner.

Whilst we are all different and respond to physical touch differently. It would be true to say (from a Christian perspective) that God created us with a deep seated need to be loved.

That is why the bible is not afraid to express the beauty of physical touch

- Kiss me and kiss me again, for your love is sweeter than wine. How pleasing is your fragrance; your name is like the spreading fragrance of scented oils. No wonder all the young women love you! **Song of songs 1:2-3**
- Like the finest apple tree in the orchard is my lover among other young men. I sit in his delightful shade and taste his delicious fruit. He escorts me to the banquet hall; it's obvious how much he loves me. Strengthen me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am weak with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me. **Song of songs 2:3-6**
- You are slender like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters of fruit. I said, "I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruit." May your breasts be like grape clusters, and the fragrance of your breath like apples. May your kisses be as exciting as the best wine. **Song of songs 7:7-9**

## **PHYSICAL AFFECTION EXERCISE**

1. What types of physical touch make you feel most loved and connected to your partner? (e.g., holding hands, cuddling, kissing, massage, etc.)

2. How comfortable are you with expressing physical affection in public?

Do you know ways you can show affection to your partner, either privately or publicly without making them feel uncomfortable? See if you are right by sharing with them.

3. Beyond sexual intimacy, how can you incorporate more non-sexual touch into your daily lives to strengthen emotional bonds?

# Marriage Prayer

Dear God

You created marriage

Since you are all knowing and all powerful and all seeing

Nothing we see in marriage relationship surprises you

You know people

You know the workings of our heart

Our uniqueness and also our follies

You see our pride

Our obstinate attitude

How we shun your wisdom

Settle for what harms

Yet you still love us

We pray that marriages

In our community

Will be all that you designed it to be

May we experience love from you

Love from our partners

Love from our communities

Love from ourselves

May our marriages be a blessing

May the joy of heaven

Fill our marriages

May hope be its foundation

May our relationship be a source of life

Fragranced with grace

Blessed by you

So we can bless others

Jesus be Lord of our marriages

Amen