

MARRIAGE WEEK

RESOURCE FOR COUPLES

This resource has been put together as part of our marriage week celebration for 2023. 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.

The resource has been developed to enhance a relationship not as a tool to brow beat anyone into doing or engaging in something they are not comfortable with. We believe communication is vital to any relationship but are also aware that people communicate in different ways.

So we hope you find this information helpful and it enhances your marriage relationship as you engage with it.

God created marriage. No government subcommittee envisioned it. No social organization developed it. Marriage was conceived and born in the mind of God."

—Max Lucado

Our prayer this week is that you will continue to know God's blessing and grace on your marriage relationship as you journey through this year and beyond.

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Two together

This is the case of a man who is all alone, without a child or a brother, yet who works hard to gain as much wealth as he can. But then he asks himself, "Who am I working for? Why am I giving up so much pleasure now?" It is all so meaningless and depressing. Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? 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 4:8-12**

Two people together are generally better than one and the writer of Ecclesiastes gives very good reasons for that, they can help each other succeed, they can keep each other warm and they can fend off attacks from others. One of the first stories told in the bible is that of one becoming two. It was not good for the first human being to be alone then and today it is still the same, we do better in community and in families than on our own.

This year in our marriage week we want to look at how we can continue to enhance our two-getherness and transform our marriage relationship into a safe haven for ourselves, family, friends and the wider community.

During our marriage week we want to explore the importance of communication to a marriage relationship. We pray and hope that as you explore this with us you will experience the divine presence in your marriage relationship.

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion it has taken place." —
George Bernard Shaw, writer

Session One | Perspective

There is a story in the bible about a church that was doing almost everything well. They loved scripture and challenged error, they had suffered for their faith and remained faithful 'but' there's always a 'but'.

The head of the church appears on the scene and tells them that he holds one thing against them. They have forgotten, overlooked, gotten into a rut and neglected their first love. This was a church that did all the right things out of duty rather than love for God, they did not love God's world and the people he placed within it, they had rather become mechanical in their interactions and this was challenged by Jesus the head of the church.

Sadly this unfortunate truth can slip into our marriage relationship. We can so easily become dutiful partners getting on with the everyday issues of life, doing all the right and necessary things but we've completely forgotten the 'why' and the 'what' of our relationship.

Why do we love each other?

What attracted us to each other?

Why did I choose you as my spouse?

What makes us good together?

Why am I doing life with you?

Clara's story

I wasn't looking for an affair and in truth, if anyone had asked me about my marriage I would have said it was happy. We functioned relatively well as a couple and as parents we worked as a team. We had our different approaches but we still felt like a team working together.

I enjoyed my work and so did my husband. At work we have all sorts of people coming through our business and as the head of buying I meet different clients as part and parcel of my work.

I met Stan at a sales conference simply because we were on the same table and during the break having coffee we chatted about each other's life, family, work life balance etc but I noticed something on the way home from the conference. Stan was a good listener and showed genuine interest in my family and work life, he remembered what I said and at the end of the day his parting words were enjoy your barbecue with friends. I was impressed that he remembered details of our conversation and a part of me secretly longed to interact with him again.

The next time I met Stan was as part of a sales team looking to partner with his company for a big project. He was his friendly self and remembered me and during coffee breaks we gravitated towards each other and talked about each other's life. It was so good to see him and on my journey home I began wondering what it would be like to spend more time with him.

I pulled into my driveway. As I exited the car my husband James was coming out of the door on his way to football training and said that the kids were fed, and that he hoped I had had a good day, and then he was gone.

As I sat waiting for James to return, I realized he was a good husband and father but somehow I realized our friendship had been put on hold as life, marriage and parenting duty overwhelmed us. I realized I wasn't showing the same interest in James' world as I had in Stan's just a couple of hours ago. We just don't

communicate anymore and sadly we have fallen into the trap of thinking we know all there is to know about each other and stopped communicating.

I decided to tell James about the affair that never happened because I knew where my interest would take me and I wanted to protect our family and marriage from that. So as James walked through the door, I did what I hadn't done in a long time and asked how football training went. "Great," he replied. "Scored any goals?" I asked. "Yes" he replied and went onto recount his exploits on the training ground. I asked "Do you want me to run you a bath?" There was a bit of a shocked look on his face as he said yes and I could see him desperately wanting to ask the question 'are you okay'? But before he could, I exited, and ran him a bath. As he laid in the bath I came in and said it would be good to talk. The shocked look on his face made me burst into such laughter but I quickly reassured him "it's all good, I love you and just miss sharing my world with you. Can we talk?"

Exercise

- What did you think of Clara's story?
- What lessons can you as a couple learn from that?
- What do you think of this quote "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion it has taken place." — **George Bernard Shaw, writer?**
- How would you rate your communication as a couple presently?
- What impact does your faith or no faith have on the way you communicate?

Session Two | Listening Without Interruption

One of the reasons why we find communication challenging is because we sometimes come to it already believing we are not going to be heard or because we've already worked out what we want the outcome of our conversation to be and we just want to shepherd our partner into agreeing with us.

Sadly what this does to communication is to stop us communicating and instead enter the world of convincing.

Creating a safe place for communicating is something that every couple needs to work out for different seasons of their relationship because as we change so also does our ability to communicate. Our life experiences give us different perspectives which can change the way we listen and decode what those who are closest to us are saying to us.

Even Jesus knew that miscommunication is part of the human experience. He asked his disciples 'who do people say I am?' and interestingly enough he did not get a uniform answer back. In conversation with his disciples he said to them 'You faithless and corrupt people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you?' Jesus was exasperated that his disciples having spent time with him still did not understand or listen to what he said about himself.

So today as we explore communication we want to look at communicating without interruption but by showing interest in our partner's world and views and hearing what they have to say and more importantly understanding their heart.

Exercise

This simple exercise seeks to root out bad habits. It might seem obvious, but going into a discussion with a 'listening without interrupting but showing interest' framework in mind helps set the tone for better communication.

It works like this: One partner speaks for five-to-seven minutes and the other partner just listens. When the first person is finished, the other then asks questions to help them understand what they just heard, questions like...

"How did you feel when you told me that?"

"How can I help to make it better next time?"

"What makes this so important to you?"

Once those questions have been answered and addressed, it's the other partner's turn to speak.

The purpose of this exercise is not to convince but to communicate so that their partner understands the underlying emotions associated with what is being communicated and what is going on in their world.

So over the next two sessions here are some pointers that will help with communicating so that you and your partner can understand each other's world and also how you both view your marriage relationship with each other.

Pointers for Today

1. Talk about what is draining your energy at the moment
2. Share what you have found or are finding helpful to replenish your energy
3. It's good to dream and our dreams say a lot about our hidden desire so just for fun share what you would do if you were suddenly given £100,000, how would you spend it?
4. When life becomes predictable it can take the shine out of life, so what is something you've never done but would like to try?
5. What do you find most fulfilling about your present life?

I want to encourage you to do this exercise together as a couple. Some of you will find this really easy to do whilst some of you are already looking for the exit door just by the mention of the word 'exercise'.

I do know however that no matter what state your relationship is in, these simple exercises will add and enhance your understanding of each other and bring you deeper into each other's world and on a challenging note for some it might help you detect a challenge in your relationship that needs both of you to focus on.

Select a time and place to do this and enjoy exploring each other's world.

Session Three | Listening Without Interruption (Cont'd)

We are continuing from our last session and this time we want to explore some aspects of our relationships that might be a little bit more challenging. But once again it's all about entering into each other's world and creating a knowing me knowing you atmosphere that enables us to grow deeper in our relationship with each other.

So here are pointers for talking today

PARENTING

Some of you are just starting the journey of parenting whilst others are now second generation parents who are enjoying having grandchildren. There are also those who are not parents but have children in extended families or friendship circles that they care deeply about. Irrespective of where you are on the parenting scale, share what you are enjoying, have enjoyed, about being a parent, grandparent, godparent or friend to a family. What responsibilities do you still shoulder and how are the challenges of parenting affecting you?

MONEY

Are there any issues about finance you'd like to talk to your partner about? Are you happy with the way you spend money as a couple? Are there things you'd like to do that you have not communicated? Also, with the current cost of living crisis do you have any worries you haven't shared that you need to share?

TIME TOGETHER

Even in our relationship with God we know we cannot just survive on services without having that time alone with God. The same is true of our marriage

relationship. Are you happy with special times together? Do you make room for that without the children or others? Share what you've enjoyed doing together and what you'd like to do more of.

TRUST

So much of our inner life is based on trust. We only open up to people we trust. We only share our innermost worries with those who have our back. So how do you show trust to your partner? Can you share your fears? Doubts? Worries? etc
What is impacting your life presently that you haven't shared, either about your relationship or something personal to you or something you are worried about that you need to trust with your partner and share with them.

LOOKING AHEAD

We all know the saying 'if you aim for nothing you will hit nothing'
What are your hopes and dreams for this year, for your family and for yourself?
We sometimes forget that God created marriage as a place of help so one person does not have to journey through life on their own. Families are an extension of marriage and scripture states God places people in families for companionship.

Your partner is not just your spouse, they are also your supporter and number one fan. They add strength to your life and are also your prayer partner; your watchman /woman before God and others, and our responsibility is to help them do that job by sharing our hopes and dreams with them so they can build us up, support us and pray for us. Any information shared with them enables them to support you better.

"A lot of problems in the world would be solved if we talked to each other instead of about each other" - **Nicky Gumbel**

Take time to do these exercises and then pray for each other.

Session Four | Gratitude

“Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for.” — **Epicurus**

Ingratitude is a sin with severe repercussions. When Paul wrote to the church in Rome he highlighted what happens when a person or society becomes corrupted and part of his lists of developing problems was ingratitude.

Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks.

Romans 1:21

Jesus' healing of the ten lepers gives an example of how highly God values thankfulness. Jesus healed all ten men, but only one returned to thank Him. His question “Didn't I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give glory to God except this foreigner? **Luke 17:17-18** this question of Jesus shows His disappointment at the ingratitude of the majority.

Being thankful is a state of mind and it is not dependent on circumstances as it is on perspective. Our perspectives will either make us angry, bitter and ungrateful or it would make us count our blessings. A thankful perspective will help us look at tomorrow brighter, lean on God and his strength and release an attitude of thankfulness within us.

In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships. It seems modern science and biblical truth both reveal the same thing, gratitude is good for you. Here are seven benefits of gratitude from a faith perspective

Gratitude increases our faith

Paul encourage believers to give thanks in all circumstances as a reflection of God's will for us (1 Thess. 5:18)

Gratitude leads to better relationships

Thanksgiving enables us to see God's work in our lives and also in others. We all know it is far more enjoyable spending time with someone who is positive and sees the good in others and themselves rather than with someone who is negative and self-consumed.

Gratitude increases our inner peace and puts anxiety at bay

Modern research into wellbeing is constantly revealing that gratefulness reduces emotional problems in a person. Maybe that is why Paul said "do not be anxious about anything...Phil. 4:6-7

Gratitude improves our physical and mental health

When Gideon realized that God was greater than the Midianites oppressors and turned from hiding to trusting and seeing God's perspective, his physical and mental state changed and he went from being the lowliest person in the weakest clan to becoming the rescuing leader of a nation.

Gratitude deepens our spiritual joy

It is hard being thankful and anxious at the same time. When we intentionally engage in thankfulness we make room for the fruits of the Spirit to invade our lives. Our joy deepens, our love expands, we are more self controlled and we manifest more patience.

Gratitude protects us from envy and jealousy

Gratitude is not a cure all for our ailments but an attitude of thankfulness protects us. It stops us from comparing ourselves to others and wishing we had what they had because we are grateful and appreciative of what we have got.

Gratitude speaks of God's greatness

Gratitude is about our perspective. How we see the world and who we believe is sovereign over the affairs of human beings. When we know and see God as the author of life and still involved in the affairs of human beings we can like the Psalmist say

“Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness.
Let the whole world know what he has done”.

Psalm 105:1

So here are 10 simple ways you can display gratitude in your relationship

1. Say it loud and often
2. Write a thoughtful note, card or letter
3. Give your spouse a break
4. Cook a special meal
5. Praise your partner to your children and friends and make sure they are around to hear it
6. Let other people know what your partner does for you
7. Behave in a grateful way
8. Take your spouse on a special date
9. Give a surprise gift
10. Strive to give more than you receive

(adapted from an article by Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott)

I know most of these are things you already do but it is good to be reminded of them and also challenge ourselves. Why not think of ways you can improve on these attitudes of gratitude in your own relationship.

A word from Andrew

Marriage week is an opportunity to give careful attention to our marriage relationship. A number of years ago I observed that if most of us treated our cars the way we treated our marriage relationship our cars would not be road worthy. Most car owners insure, service and m.o.t their car on a yearly basis whilst washing it, filling it with petrol. The thought was if we applied the same attitude towards our marriage relationship we would enhance the quality of our relationships.

Marriage comes under so much pressure and mocking today. It is normally portrayed in negative terms and seen as the end of romance, but all the research into marriage shows something completely different.

This is from the Harvard Health Publishing

Okay, that might be an overstatement. But there is fascinating — and compelling — research suggesting that married people enjoy better health than single people. For example, as compared with those who are single, those who are married tend to

- live longer
- have fewer strokes and heart attacks
- have a lower chance of becoming depressed
- be less likely to have advanced cancer at the time of diagnosis and more likely to survive cancer for a longer period of time
- survive a major operation more often

Marriage is an amazing gift to humanity and it is the reason God placed it at the foundation of human society. Marriage precedes family, community, villages, towns, cities and nations and when marriages are strong all other areas of human life flourishes.

My desire is that you will continue to experience the depth and breath of love in your marriage relationship and your marriage will be a blessing not just to your family and friends but to the wider community around you.

Andrew Fadoju