

WORKBOOK

WITH BIBLICAL REFERENCES

PREPARE  ENRICH[®]

• *building strong marriages* •

— COUPLE'S WORKBOOK —



www.prepare-enrich.com

Welcome to the PREPARE/ENRICH Program

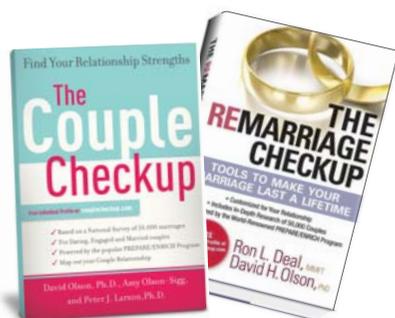
Congratulations! You have taken an important step in building a strong marriage by joining over 2.5 million other couples who have benefited from PREPARE-ENRICH. Over the last three decades, this program has been scientifically improved and updated. Research studies have demonstrated it can improve your relationship skills and happiness as a couple.

We hope you will find encouragement and insight from the Scripture verses we have included here for your study. You will find over 100 different verses you can use in your feedback sessions for PREPARE-ENRICH or in your own discussions as a couple.

Remember to keep your relationship a priority by seeking out opportunities to help it grow. If, however, you find you have ongoing problems that don't go away over time, consider professional counseling. Contact your current facilitator for more information or go to our website (www.prepare-enrich.com) and search under "Find a Facilitator."

Get your Couple Checkup on your Wedding Anniversary

One of the best ways to maintain a healthy and happy relationship is to invest time and energy in it. We highly recommend you take the online **Couple Checkup** once a year (www.CoupleCheckup.com). The Checkup is built on the foundation of the PREPARE-ENRICH assessment you recently completed. It will provide you with an in-depth Couple's Report and Discussion Guide to help you figure out how your relationship has changed over the last year. You will also get access to several relationship-enhancing exercises to that will keep your relationship on a healthy path.



Checkup Books

Build more strengths in your marriage. Whether this is your first or subsequent marriage, we have a resource for you. You'll find even more couple exercises and relationship skills so you can work together to create a more satisfying relationship.

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COUPLE'S WORKBOOK
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SHARING STRENGTH AND GROWTH AREAS

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control . . . — GALATIANS 5:22-23

Check what areas you agree or disagree most with your partner.

- **Select three Strength Areas** (most agreement and positive aspects of your relationship)
- **Select three Growth Areas** (most disagreement and areas you want to improve)

| | STRENGTH AREAS | GROWTH AREAS |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. COMMUNICATION <i>We share feelings and understand each other.</i> | | |
| 2. CONFLICT RESOLUTION <i>We are able to discuss and resolve differences.</i> | | |
| 3. PARTNER STYLE AND HABITS <i>We appreciate each other's personality and habits.</i> | | |
| 4. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT <i>We agree on budget and financial matters.</i> | | |
| 5. LEISURE ACTIVITIES <i>We have a good balance of activities together and apart.</i> | | |
| 6. SEXUALITY AND AFFECTION <i>We are comfortable discussing sexual issues and affection.</i> | | |
| 7. FAMILY AND FRIENDS <i>We feel good about our relationships with relatives and friends.</i> | | |
| 8. RELATIONSHIP ROLES <i>We agree on how to share decision-making and responsibilities.</i> | | |
| 9. CHILDREN AND PARENTING <i>We agree on issues related to having and raising children.</i> | | |
| 10. SPIRITUAL BELIEFS <i>We hold similar religious values and beliefs.</i> | | |

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

1. Take turns sharing what each of you perceive as your relationship strengths. Verbally share one strength at a time, until you each have shared three.
2. Use the same procedure to share and discuss growth areas.
3. Now have a discussion around these questions:
 - a. **Did any of your partner's responses surprise you?**
 - b. **In what areas did you mostly agree with your partner?**
 - c. **In what areas did you mostly disagree with your partner?**



COMMUNICATION

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. — JAMES 1:19

ASSERTIVENESS AND ACTIVE LISTENING

ASSERTIVENESS:

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in the relationship.

Assertiveness is a valuable communication skill. In successful couples, both individuals tend to be quite assertive. Rather than assuming their partner can read their minds, they share how they feel and ask clearly and directly for what they want.

Assertive individuals take responsibility for their messages by using “I” statements. They avoid statements beginning with “you.” In making constructive requests, they are positive and respectful in their communication. They use polite phrases such as “please” and “thank you”.

Examples of Assertive Statements:

“I’m feeling out of balance. While I love spending time with you, I also want to spend time with my friends. I would like us to find some time to talk about this.”

“I want to take a ski vacation next winter, but I know you like to go to the beach. I’m feeling confused about what choice we should make.”

ACTIVE LISTENING:

Active listening is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.

Good communication depends on you carefully listening to another person. Active listening involves listening attentively without interruption and then restating what was heard. Acknowledge content AND the feelings of the speaker. The active listening process lets the sender know whether or not the message they sent was clearly understood by having the listener restate what they heard.

Examples of Active Listening:

“I heard you say you are feeling ‘out of balance’, and enjoy the time we spend together but that you also need more time to be with your friends. You want to plan a time to talk about this.”

“If I understand what you said, you are concerned because you want to go skiing next winter. But you think I would rather to go to the beach. Is that correct?”

When each person knows what the other person feels and wants (assertiveness) and when each knows they have been heard and understood (active listening), intimacy is increased. These two communication skills can help you grow closer as a couple.



COMMUNICATION

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. — PSALM 19:14*

CREATING A WISH LIST

In this exercise, you will each individually make a Wish List of things you would like more or less of in your relationship. Next, take turns sharing your Wish Lists with each other.

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in your relationship.

Active listening is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.

In sharing your Wish List with your partner, you will be demonstrating your Assertiveness skills. In giving feedback to your partner about their Wish List, you will be demonstrating your Active Listening skills.

- **Make a Wish List of three things you would like more or less of in your relationship.**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

Take turns sharing your Wish List with each other.

SPEAKER'S JOB:

1. Speak for yourself ("I" statements e.g. "I wish...").
2. Describe how you would feel if your wish came true.

LISTENER'S JOB:

1. Repeat/summarize what you have heard.
2. Describe the wish AND how your partner would feel if the wish came true.

After completing the Wish List Exercise, discuss the following questions:

How good were each of you at being assertive?

In what ways did you each effectively use active listening skills?



COMMUNICATION

Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing. — PROVERBS 12:18

DAILY DIALOGUE AND DAILY COMPLIMENTS

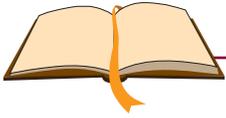
Daily Dialogue is an intentional effort to talk about your relationship, rather than discussing your activities that day. The focus of this dialogue should be on your feelings about each other and your lives together. Set aside five minutes per day to discuss the following:

- *What did you most enjoy about your relationship today?*
- *What was dissatisfying about your relationship today?*
- *How can you be helpful to each other?*

Daily Compliments help you focus on the positive things you like about each other. Every day give your partner at least one genuine compliment. These can be general (“*you are fun to be with*”) or specific (“*I appreciate that you were on time for the concert*”).

• COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO INCREASE INTIMACY •

1. **Give full attention to your partner when talking.** Turn off the phone, shut off the television, make eye contact.
2. **Focus on the good qualities in each other and often praise each other.**
3. **Be assertive.** Share your thoughts, feelings, and needs.
A good way to be assertive without being critical is to use “I” rather than “You” statements. (e.g. “*I worry when you don’t let me know you’ll be late*” rather than “*You are always late*”).
4. **Avoid criticism.**
5. **If you must criticize, balance it with at least one positive comment.**
(e.g. “*I appreciate how you take the trash out each week. In the future can you remember to also wheel the trash can back from the end of the driveway?*”).
6. **Listen to understand, not to judge.**
7. **Use active listening.** Summarize your partner’s comments before sharing your own reactions or feelings.
8. **Avoid blaming each other and work together for a solution.**
9. **Use the Ten Steps approach.** For problems that come up again and again, use the *Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict*.
10. **Seek counseling.** If you are not able to resolve issues, seek counseling before they become more serious.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT COMMUNICATION

PSALM 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

PROVERBS 17:27 A truly wise person uses few words; a person with understanding is even tempered.

PROVERBS 12:18 Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.

MATTHEW 7:3 And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?

PROVERBS 20:19 A gossip goes around telling secrets, so don't hang around with chatterers.

JAMES 1:19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

PROVERBS 18:13 Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.



PERSONAL STRESS PROFILE

²⁸ Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

— MATTHEW 11:28-29

IDENTIFYING MOST CRITICAL ISSUES

Do you control stress in your life or does stress control you?

Stressors are events that cause an emotional and/or physical reaction. Stress can be positive (wedding, job promotion) or negative (loss of job, car accident, major illness). But what is important is to be able to manage the many stressors in your life.

One way to manage stress is to prioritize the issues that are most important to you. Another is to decide what issues can be changed or resolved and which ones cannot. This exercise will help you focus on the high priority issues and those that can be changed (Box 1).

Couple Exercise:

1. You will each select **four issues** that are the most stressful for each of you from the Computer Report.
2. Review each issue and put it into one of the four cells below.
3. Box 1 contains the "Most Critical Issues."

| | Able to Change | Difficult to Change |
|---------------|--|---|
| High Priority | <p>Box 1: Most Critical Issues</p> <p><i>What changes can you each make?</i></p> | <p>Box 2</p> <p><i>How do you plan to cope?</i></p> |
| Low Priority | <p>Box 3</p> <p><i>Are you spending too much time on low priority issues?</i></p> | <p>Box 4: Least Critical Issues</p> <p><i>Can you accept or forget about these issues?</i></p> |

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

Select one issue from Box 1 that you will work on together as a couple.

Work together as a team to achieve your goals.

1. Communicate about the issue.
2. Use good conflict resolution skills.
3. Be flexible with one another.



PERSONAL STRESS PROFILE

My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

— *PSALM 73:26*

BALANCING YOUR PRIORITIES

First, indicate how much time you “Now” spend on each of these areas. Next, decide on the amount of time you would ideally spend—“Your Goal.” Then decide how you can achieve your goal.

| | NOW (Hours per week) | YOUR GOAL | How will you move toward your goal? |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|--|
| WORK: | | | |
| Time on job/school | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Bringing work home | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Commuting | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| PERSONAL: | | | |
| Exercise | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Television | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Computer/video games | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Hobby/Recreation | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Reading | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Friends | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Religious activities | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Volunteering | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Sleep (hours per night) | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| MARRIAGE: (Couple) | | | |
| At home together | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Activities/Dates | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Discussions (minutes per day) | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| HOME: | | | |
| Cleaning | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Cooking | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Grocery shopping | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Errands | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Lawn/Garden | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Home maintenance | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| FAMILY: (if children at home) | | | |
| Number of meals together | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Family activities | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Transporting children | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Helping with homework | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| At home together | _____ | _____ | _____ |

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

- What areas feel out of balance to each of you?
- What steps must you take in order for your goal to become reality?



PERSONAL STRESS PROFILE

WEDDING STRESS

Differences and disagreements are as inevitable in wedding planning as they are in marriage itself. This is a good time to learn how to deal with them. Here are some strategies you might find helpful:

1. Consider the big picture as it affects each decision. Some decisions will be made consequentially as other wishes are discussed. For example, the guest list should be created early because it shapes decisions about facilities and costs, among other things. If one of you wants a tropical beach wedding and the other a hometown wedding, you can discuss these options in the light of other issues such as the fact both of you want your frail grandparents to come to your wedding. Seeing the larger picture can help you resolve differences.

2. Ask yourselves who cares more about the issue. You can decide to gracefully adjust your preference if your partner has strong feelings about an issue. You may prefer a small, intimate wedding but your partner has cherished the family tradition of a large wedding. Try setting a number that gives more to the person who cares the most.

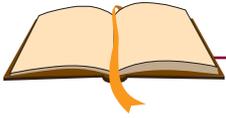
3. Periodically assess your wedding-planning stress and feelings of competency. If your partner has not followed through on a task they were responsible for, or if you feel better equipped for a particular task, politely offer to help or take over (e.g., “I am interested in photography and have a light work schedule next week. Is it okay if I research a photographer?”). The key is to agree together on a shift of responsibility, rather than saying, “Since you won’t do it, I will!” The person who has been relieved of one responsibility should then offer to help with other responsibilities.

4. Teach and learn from one another rather than assuming the other “gets it.” Sometimes one of you will not see a problem that is quite clear to the other. You can both educate each other about your families and their traditions. The groom from a Catholic family should explain to his Protestant bride what is involved in a traditional Catholic wedding, rather than having surprises keep coming up.

5. When you are doing your best to deal with your differences and yet remain polarized, consider whether deeper issues are underlying your conflict. For example, sometimes the issue is not about the size of the wedding but about a feeling of envy or competition because one of you has a bigger family or circle of friends. Sometimes the issue is not between the two of you, but between one of you and your family members.

The standard tools of effective communication taught in PREPARE/ENRICH are particularly important when there is tension between you. Examples are speaking for yourself using “I-statements” rather than attacking the other person, listening to understand before proposing solutions, and choosing the best time and place to talk about difficult matters. Your everyday communication patterns might be fine for everyday matters, but when you are negotiating a wedding, it’s good to be at your best!

From *Take Back Your Wedding: Managing the People Stress of Wedding Planning*, by William J. Doherty and Elizabeth Doherty Thomas (2007). For more information and resources to deal with your wedding, visit www.TheFirstDance.com



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PERSONAL STRESS

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 ⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

MATTHEW 6:28-30 ²⁸ "And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, ²⁹ yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ³⁰ And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?"

1 PETER 5:7 Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

LUKE 12:22-23 ²² Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing.

EXODUS 33:14 The Lord replied, "I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you."

HEBREWS 13:5 Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you."

JOSHUA 1:9 This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

MATTHEW 11:28-29 ²⁸ Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

PSALM 29:11 The Lord gives his people strength. The Lord blesses them with peace.

PSALM 73:26 My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

ROMANS 5:3-5 ³ We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴ And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵ And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

TEN STEPS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

All couples have differences and disagreements. Studies show the amount of disagreements are not related to marital happiness as much as how they are handled. Happy couples do not avoid disagreements; they resolve them while remaining respectful of each other, thereby strengthening their relationship. This Ten Step Model is a simple, but effective way to resolve conflict while avoiding the common and destructive patterns. Use this model with an ongoing issue in your relationship, as well as future issues.

1. Set a time and place for discussion.

2. Define the problem - Be specific.

3. List the ways you each contribute to the problem.

Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

4. List past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful.

1) _____ 3) _____

2) _____ 4) _____

5. Brainstorm—Pool your new ideas and try to list 10 possible solutions to the problem. Do not judge or criticize any of the suggestions at this point.

1) _____ 6) _____

2) _____ 7) _____

3) _____ 8) _____

4) _____ 9) _____

5) _____ 10) _____

6. Discuss and evaluate each of these possible solutions. (Be as objective as possible. Talk about how useful and appropriate each suggestion feels for resolving your issue.)

7. Agree on one solution to try.

8. Agree how you will each work toward this solution. (Be as specific as possible.)

Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

9. Set up another meeting to discuss your progress.

Place: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

10. Reward each other for progress. (If you notice your partner making a positive contribution toward the solution, praise his/her effort.)



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. — 1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

HOW TO TAKE A TIME-OUT

Some conflicts become heated as levels of anger and frustration rise. Rather than speaking assertively, partners begin to accuse, criticize, or yell. Rather than listening actively, partners interrupt, belittle, and ignore. Physiologically, the “fight or flight” response is triggered as each person goes into a protection mode with little or no regard for their partner. In this state of escalation, it is not uncommon to say or do things we later regret. Moreover, it is nearly impossible to have a productive conversation leading to a mutually agreed upon resolution. This is when a “time-out” can be beneficial. A time-out provides couples with an opportunity to cool down, identify their feelings and needs, and begin to think productively again about how to approach the issues they face.

1. RECOGNIZE YOUR NEED FOR A TIME-OUT. Are your fists clenched? Is your face red? Are you breathing fast? Are the tears streaming down your face? Do you feel like screaming or throwing something? Are you afraid of your partner’s intensity? Do you feel emotionally closed off?

- Learn to recognize the signs that things have become too intense for you to have a productive interaction with your partner.
- What physical and emotional reactions indicate you need a time-out?

2. REQUEST THE TIME-OUT. Call a time-out for yourself by saying something like “I’m just too angry to talk right now; I need to take a time-out. Please give me an hour to calm down and gather my thoughts.”

- Remember to call the time-out for yourself. It is seldom helpful to tell the other person “You need a time-out!” Suggest a time when you think you’ll be ready to resume.

3. RELAX AND CALM DOWN. Take some deep breaths. Go for a jog. Take a walk or a bath. Write in your journal. Read, pray, or watch television for a while.

- Do something that will help you relax and recover from the emotional intensity.
- What method(s) could you use to calm down?

4. REMEMBER WHAT’S IMPORTANT.

- Try to identify what you were thinking and feeling that became so difficult to discuss.
- Think about “I” messages you could use to tell your partner what you were thinking or feeling, and what you need from him/her.
- Try to spend some quiet time considering your partner’s point of view and what they are feeling.
- Remember the two of you are a team, and the only way your relationship will “win” is if you work toward a solution that both individuals can feel good about.

5. RESUME THE CONVERSATION. Bring in the skills of Assertiveness and Active Listening and/or the Ten Steps for Conflict Resolution. These structured skills can help contain the intensity as you attempt to resolve a conflict. Honor your commitment to return to the issue when you are ready to have a more productive conversation.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

¹⁴ *“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. — MATTHEW 6:14-15*

SEEKING AND GRANTING FORGIVENESS

All couples eventually experience times of conflict, hurt, and letting each other down. Sometimes the offense is as minor as forgetting a date or failing to run an errand. For some couples, the offense might involve a major betrayal such as infidelity, addiction, or abuse. Either way, taking time to seek and grant forgiveness can play a powerful role in healing and restoring the relationship.

Forgiveness is the decision or choice to give up the right for vengeance, retribution, and negative thoughts toward an offender in order to be free from anger and resentment. This process promotes healing and restoration of inner peace, and it can allow reconciliation to take place in the relationship.

It is also important to be clear about what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not forgetting, condoning, or perpetuating injustice. Since it is sometimes unsafe or impossible, forgiveness does not always involve reconciliation. Forgiveness is not always quick; it is a process that can take time to unfold. Don't rush your partner if they need to spend days or weeks working through the process of granting forgiveness.

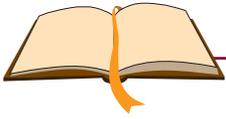
Six Steps for Seeking Forgiveness:

1. Admit what you did was wrong or hurtful.
2. Try to understand/empathize with the pain you have caused.
3. Take responsibility for your actions and make restitution if necessary.
4. Assure your partner you will not do it again.
5. Apologize and ask for forgiveness.
6. Forgive yourself.

Six Steps for Granting Forgiveness:

1. Acknowledge your pain and anger. Allow yourself to feel disrespected.
2. Be specific about your future expectations and limits.
3. Give up your right to “get even,” but insist on being treated better in the future.
4. Let go of blame, resentment, and negativity toward your partner.
5. Communicate your act of forgiveness to your partner.
6. Work toward reconciliation (when safe).

Created in part with content contributions made by Richard D. Marks, Ph.D., Marriage for Life, Inc., Jacksonville, FL



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT CONFLICT RESOLUTION

COLOSSIANS 3:19 Husbands love your wives and never treat them harshly.

EPHESIANS 4:26 And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry.

PROVERBS 14:29 People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.

ECCLESIASTES 7:8-9 ⁸ Finishing is better than starting. Patience is better than pride. ⁹ Control your temper, for anger labels you a fool.

ROMANS 12:19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the Lord.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

ROMANS 12:17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.

2 TIMOTHY 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

PROVERBS 17:9 Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.

GALATIANS 5:22-23 ²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

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



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

⁶ Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. ⁷ After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. — I TIMOTHY 6:6-7

THE CHALLENGES OF MONEY

The joining of two individuals is the joining of two different orientations to money. Our early experiences help shape our values about money. Money operates metaphorically in our lives, representing many other things such as security, nurturance, opportunity, trust, and the relationship between dependence and independence. Little wonder then that money is a major cause of conflict and a multilayered problem for married couples.

Setting Financial Goals Exercise:

Often goals are an extension of money orientations and should be considered together. The partner who is oriented to security is more apt to have financial goals around savings than the partner whose money orientation is centered around enjoyment. Create, discuss, and share financial goals in the Financial Goals exercise.

Creating a Budget Exercise:

Budgeting is the process of allocating expenses on a regular basis. Budgeting puts you in control of your spending—a process that can be very empowering in a culture where we are constantly enticed to spend money. One good way to create a budget is to keep track of everything you spend money on for 1-3 months, and then average your expenditures per category. Complete the Budget Worksheet as your workable budget, making sure to allot a monthly amount into 'savings'.

The Meaning of Money Exercise:

In this exercise you will assess and then discuss your orientation toward money. The advantage of understanding your partner's money orientation is you can then capitalize on and balance each other's strengths.

A Word about Savings. The book, "The Millionaire Next Door" by Stanley and Danko (1996) illuminated the fact that the average American millionaire is self-made, most often living modestly, choosing to save at least 15% of their income and spending much less on material possessions. A high-profile spender, driving expensive cars and wearing designer clothing, often times has little investment or savings.

Only 19% of the millionaires surveyed received any of their wealth from an estate or trust fund, dispelling the popular myth that wealth is often passed down from previous generations. Saving allows a person to benefit from compounding interest and is key to any good financial management plan.



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

⁹ Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. ¹⁰ Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine. — PROVERBS 3:9-10

IMPORTANCE OF FINANCIAL GOALS

Couples argue about finances more than any other topic. Regardless of how much or how little money a couple has, deciding what to purchase and how to spend their money is problematic for most couples.

Typically, most couples focus on only short-term financial goals like: “Today I will pay \$100 on my credit card bill.” But short-term goals should also take into consideration your long-term goals like: “We want to save enough to make a down payment on a house.”

One way to reduce the amount of conflict regarding finances is for you and your partner to discuss and decide on your short-term and long-term financial goals. Setting common goals as a couple can increase your sense of teamwork and collaboration in this complex area of finances.

Identifying and Deciding on Your Financial Goals

Each person should individually brainstorm their short-term and long-term financial goals and then share them with each other. Short-term goals should be what you can achieve in six months to one year. Long term goals might be achieved from one to five years. Remember, your goals should be realistic, clear and specific.

Short-Term Goals: (six months to one year)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Long-Term Goals: (one to five years)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

- Share your lists with one another. What do they have in common?
- Where are they different?
- Decide together as a couple on your common goals.
- Talk about how you can each contribute to achieving these goals.
- Revisit them from time to time so you stay on track.



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

BUDGET WORKSHEET

| MONTHLY INCOME: (Take Home Pay) | | | |
|--|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| | Total Partner 1: | | |
| | Total Partner 2: | | |
| | TOTAL COUPLE: | | |
| | | | |
| MONTHLY EXPENSES | | Current Spending | Future Budget Plan |
| GIVING | Contributions/Tithe: | | |
| HOUSING | Rent or Mortgage: | | |
| | Utilities: | | |
| | Phone: | | |
| LOANS/DEBT | Auto: | | |
| | Personal: | | |
| | Credit Cards: | | |
| CAR | Gasoline: | | |
| | Repairs/Maintenance: | | |
| FOOD | Food at home: | | |
| | Food away from home: | | |
| HEALTH CARE | | | |
| INSURANCE | Medical: | | |
| | Car: | | |
| | Home/Life/Health: | | |
| CLOTHING | | | |
| PERSONAL GOODS | | | |
| HOUSEHOLD SUPPLIES | | | |
| SERVICES | Cell phone: | | |
| | Cable/Dish: | | |
| | Internet: | | |
| | Dry Cleaning/Laundry: | | |
| | Other: | | |
| OTHER EXPENDITURES | Savings: | | |
| | Gifts: | | |
| | Entertainment: | | |
| | Daycare: | | |
| | Child support: | | |
| | Other: | | |
| TOTAL COUPLE INCOME: | | | |
| TOTAL EXPENSES: | | | |
| SURPLUS OR DEFICIT: | | | |



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------|------------------------|
| 1 Strongly Disagree | 2 Disagree | 3 Undecided | 4 Agree | 5 Strongly Agree |
|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------|------------------------|

THE MEANING OF MONEY

Use the 1-5 scale to respond to each of the statements below:

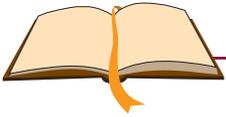
- _____ 1. I look up to people who have been very financially successful.
- _____ 2. In making a major purchase, I consider what others will think of my choice.
- _____ 3. Having high quality things reflects well on me.
- _____ 4. It is important for me to maintain a lifestyle similar to or better than that of my peers.
- _____ 5. Having some money in savings is very important to me.
- _____ 6. I would rather have extra money in the bank than some new purchase.
- _____ 7. I prefer safe investing with a moderate return versus high-risk investing with potentially high returns.
- _____ 8. I feel more secure when I know we have enough money for our bills.
- _____ 9. I really enjoy shopping and buying new things.
- _____ 10. People who have more money have more fun.
- _____ 11. I really enjoy spending money on myself and on others.
- _____ 12. Money can't buy happiness, but it sure helps.
- _____ 13. He or she who controls the purse strings calls the shots.
- _____ 14. I would be uncomfortable putting all my money into a joint account.
- _____ 15. One of the important benefits of money is the ability to influence others.
- _____ 16. I think we each should control the money we earn.

Scoring and interpretation: After taking the quiz, add up your answers to the four questions for each category and record your scores below. Scores for each category can range from 4 to 20, with a high score indicating more agreement with that approach. It is possible to have high or low scores in more than one category. General guidelines for interpreting your scores appear in the box below.

| Category | Add Items | Your Score | Interpretation of Score | Score | Interpretation |
|--------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Money as status | 1-4 | _____ | _____ | 17-20 | Very high |
| Money as security | 5-8 | _____ | _____ | 13-16 | High |
| Money as enjoyment | 9-12 | _____ | _____ | 9-12 | Moderate |
| Money as control | 13-16 | _____ | _____ | 4-8 | Low |

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

Compare how you individually scored in each category. Discuss how you each value money.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT FINANCES & MONEY

LUKE 16:13 “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

PROVERBS 3:9-10 ⁹ Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. ¹⁰ Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine.

PROVERBS 13:11 Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows over time.

ECCLESIASTES 5:10 Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!

HEBREWS 13:5 Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.”

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10 ⁶ Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. ⁷ After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. ⁸ So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. ⁹ But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19 ¹⁷ Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. ¹⁹ By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.

MATTHEW 6:19-21 ¹⁹ “Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.



LEISURE ACTIVITIES

THE DATING EXERCISE

If you want to keep your relationship alive and growing, our best advice is to date your mate! Dating will help you maintain a friendship—one of the best indicators of a successful, long-term marriage. The habit of dating is the catalyst for building your couple friendship and staying emotionally connected through the coming years. This exercise will help you establish, reestablish, or reinforce the dating habit.

1. Separately write down your answers to the following questions:

- As you think about the life of your relationship, what have been your most favorite dates?

- What do you enjoy doing together? (sports, hobbies, interests, and recreational activities)

- What are some things you would like to learn or pursue together? (e.g. sports, cooking, hiking)

2. Share your answers with each other and brainstorm a combined list of potential dates.

a. _____

c. _____

b. _____

d. _____

3. Evaluate your combined list and rank the order in which to do them. Use the criteria below to evaluate your dates. For instance, if your budget is tight, you may want to recreate a favorite date when you made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and had a picnic in the park.

- **Time required for date** (for instance, 1 hour, 2 hours, evening, afternoon, morning or whole day)
- **Financial resources needed for date** (\$ = inexpensive, \$\$ = moderate, \$\$\$ = expensive)
- **Energy level** (low energy, medium energy, high energy)

a. _____

c. _____

b. _____

d. _____

4. Now pull out your calendars and write in one date a week for the next two months. It takes three weeks to make a new habit (or relearn an old one) and six weeks to feel good about it. Date your partner once a week for the next two months and you will be well on your way to energizing your relationship with fun, romance and laughter!

For information on the *10 Great Dates* By David and Claudia Arp visit: www.marriagealive.com



SEX AND AFFECTION

Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage... — HEBREWS 13:4

THE EXPRESSION OF INTIMACY

Emotional intimacy and physical intimacy are closely related. Couples who have a good emotional relationship and feel loved and appreciated have the best physical relationship.

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

The following questions were designed using the definition of affection as “any verbal or nonverbal expression that communicates love in a non-sexual way.”

Affection is, to a large degree, a learned skill. Even those who seem to be “naturals” in this area usually had some training in their childhood as they saw and experienced the expressions of affection modeled around them. Those for whom affection seems awkward may have come from a home where affection was absent or rarely expressed. Either way, it’s important to discuss your upbringing and how it has affected your expectations in this area.

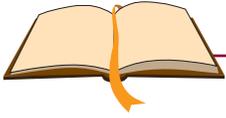
- **What does “affection” mean to you?**
- **How much affection was there in your families growing up (verbal and nonverbal)?**
- **How did you respond to the affection (or lack of affection) you received?**
- **How did your father show affection?**
- **How did your mother show affection ?**
- **On a scale of 1-10, how much affection do you want in your marriage?**
(1—very little, 10—great amount)

For Premarital Couples:

- What was the attitude toward sex in your family? Was it talked about?
- Where did you learn about sex?
- Have you fully disclosed your sexual history to your partner? If not, why not?
- Has lack of affection or sexual dissatisfaction ever been a factor for you in the breakup of a relationship?
- Discuss your views on pornography.
- Have you discussed family planning and/or birth control?

For Married Couples:

- What do you need in order to be in the mood for sex?
- Do you feel comfortable initiating sex? Why or why not?
- How often would you prefer or expect sex?
- What sexual activities do you enjoy most?
- Are there specific sexual acts that make you uncomfortable?
- How could you each contribute to making your sexual relationship more satisfying?



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SEXUALITY

PROVERBS 5:18-19 ¹⁸ Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. ¹⁹ She is a loving deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you always be captivated by her love.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:3 The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:4-5 ⁴ The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. ⁵ Do not deprive each other of sexual relations . . .

HEBREWS 13:4 Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery.

EPHESIANS 5:28 In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself.

SONG OF SOLOMON 7:10-12 ¹⁰ I am my lover's, and he claims me as his own. ¹¹ Come, my love, let us go out to the fields and spend the night among the wildflowers. ¹² Let us get up early and go to the vineyards to see if the grapevines have budded, if the blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates have bloomed. There I will give you my love.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20 ¹⁹ Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, ²⁰ for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.



RELATIONSHIP ROLES

² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. — EPHESIANS 4:2-3

SHARING ROLES

List your responsibilities and your partner's responsibilities related to the household and/or children. Your partner should also separately create the same two lists. *Note: For couples who are not yet sharing a household, complete these lists as things you expect to do in your future household.*

Things You Do (or plan to do)
for your Household

Things Your Partner Does (or plans to do)
for your Household

a. _____

a. _____

b. _____

b. _____

c. _____

c. _____

d. _____

d. _____

e. _____

e. _____

f. _____

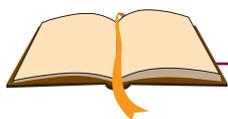
f. _____

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

1. After you have each completed your lists, compare and discuss them. Any surprises?
2. Are roles mainly divided by interests and skill, or by more traditional male/female roles?
3. Consider for a moment how similar or dissimilar these lists are compared to what you witnessed in your parents' roles growing up.
4. Discuss what each of you would like to adjust in your lists of roles. If needed, agree on how you might revise your current lists.
5. Revise your current lists, finalizing an agreement about tasks you will each do in the future. Set a time to review the new lists.

Relationship Roles Exercise: Switching Roles for a Week

After you have each completed your Household Tasks lists, plan a day (or a week) when you can perform each other's household responsibilities. This Role Reversal experiment will help you gain a new appreciation for one another.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP ROLES

EPHESIANS 4:2-3 ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

ROMANS 12:3-5 ³ Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. ⁴ Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, ⁵ so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

MATTHEW 22:37-39 ³⁷ Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10 ⁹ Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. ¹⁰ If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.

TITUS 2:7-8 ⁷ And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching. ⁸ Teach the truth so that your teaching can't be criticized. Then those who oppose us will be ashamed and have nothing bad to say about us.

GALATIANS 6:10 Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.

JOHN 13:35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

GALATIANS 6:2 Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.

JAMES 3:18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

1 PETER 1:22 You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.

1 PETER 3:7 In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered.



SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

³⁰ *And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.* ³¹ *The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these.* — MARK 12:30-31

YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Spirituality and faith are powerful dimensions of the human experience. Spiritual beliefs can provide a foundation for the values and behaviors of individuals and couples. People who profess a spiritual faith do, indeed, feel their beliefs breathe life into their relationships. Couples with high agreement on spiritual beliefs report much higher levels of marital satisfaction and closeness than those with low spiritual agreement.

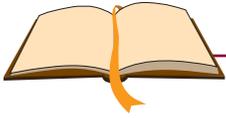
Given the potential benefits of spiritual beliefs in a relationship, it makes sense for partners to explore and evaluate their compatibility regarding spiritual beliefs. Couples with strong spiritual beliefs and practices say their faith provides a foundation that deepens their love and helps them grow together and achieve their dreams. If you and your partner's spiritual beliefs are incompatible, talking about the origins of your beliefs can help you understand one another.

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

How much do you know about your partner's religious history? How much do you know about your own religious history? Family heritage lends a sense of stability and tranquility to relationships.

Set aside some time to discuss the following questions together and share your individual responses. If you do not have the answers, ask other family members about their perspective.

1. What is your family's religious tradition and heritage?
2. What holidays (holy days) and rituals does your family observe?
3. How similar or dissimilar are your personal religious and spiritual beliefs compared to those of your family?
4. What holidays (holy days) and rituals do you find personally meaningful?
5. What holiday/religious symbols hold special meaning to you (the Menorah, a Cross, or a Christmas tree)?
6. Is/was there significance to the food you prepare?
7. What is the meaning of the gifts you exchange?
8. How does your spiritual life affect your values and the decisions you make?
9. To what extent do you/would you like to integrate your faith or spiritual life into your marriage relationship?
10. Do you have strong feelings or opinions about the religious upbringing you'd like to provide for your children?
11. How has your understanding of God changed through your life?
12. What do you believe is the meaning of life?



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

PSALM 23:1 The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.

PSALM 27:1 The Lord is my light and my salvation so why should I be afraid? The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?

2 TIMOTHY 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

HEBREWS 13:5-6 ⁵ Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you." ⁶ So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?"

1 PETER 5:6-7 ⁶ So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. ⁷ Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

DEUTERONOMY 31:8 Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you."

MATTHEW 10:39 If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.

MARK 12:30-31 ³⁰ And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' ³¹ The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."



MARRIAGE EXPECTATIONS

Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction? — AMOS 3:3

MANAGING YOUR EXPECTATIONS

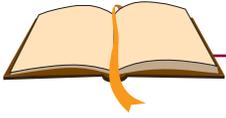
Expectations about love and marriage have a powerful impact on relationships. To a large degree, you will be disappointed or happy in life based on how well what is happening matches up with what you think should be happening. All married couples start out hoping for and believing they will experience the very best. Problems arise when these hopes and beliefs are not based on reality.

The following statements are common fantasies couples have about marriage. Read them and select the ones you believe are true. Take turns sharing and discussing these with each other.

1. My partner will meet all my needs for companionship.
2. Time will resolve our problems.
3. If I have to ask, it is not as meaningful.
4. We should live 'happily ever after' with no major problems.
5. Keeping secrets about my past or present is acceptable if it would only cause pain for my partner.
6. Less romance means we have less love for one another.
7. Our relationship will remain the same.
8. My partner's interest in sex will be the same as mine.
9. Our relationship will be better when we have a baby.
10. We will do things just like my family did.
11. Nothing could cause us to question our love for one another.
12. I believe I know everything there is to know about my partner.
13. Love is all you need for a great marriage.
14. It is better to keep silent about something bothering me than to cause unnecessary problems in our relationship.

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

1. Which of these statements have you been tempted to believe?
2. If you agree with these statements, how might they set you up for being disappointed later on?
3. How does believing or living out these statements keep you from fully loving and/or honoring yourself and your partner?



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE

GENESIS 2:18,24 ¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” ²⁴ This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

MATTHEW 19:4-6 ⁴ “Haven’t you read the Scriptures?” Jesus replied. “They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁵ And he said, ‘This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ ⁶ Since they are no longer two but one let no one split apart what God has joined together.”

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-11 ⁹ Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. ¹⁰ If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. ¹¹ Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone?

PROVERBS 31:10-11 ¹⁰ Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? She is more precious than rubies. ¹¹ Her husband can trust her, and she will greatly enrich his life.

EPHESIANS 5:25 For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her.

EPHESIANS 5:31-33 ³¹ As the Scriptures say, “A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” ³² This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. ³³ So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

GENESIS 2:23-24 ²³ “At last!” the man exclaimed. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’” ²⁴ This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

MATTHEW 18:19 “I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you.

AMOS 3:3 Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?



CHILDREN AND PARENTING

Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it. — PROVERBS 22:6

FOR COUPLES PLANNING TO HAVE CHILDREN

COUPLE DISCUSSION ABOUT CHILDREN:

1. Discuss if and when you would like to have children.
2. How many children would you like to have?
3. What would you do if you had an unexpected pregnancy before you planned to have children?
4. What would you do if you learned you were unable to have children (e.g. Adoption? Fertility treatments?)
5. What are your expectations for the roles of a Father and a Mother?
6. Who do you anticipate or expect will care for your child during their infancy and early childhood (You? Your partner? A daycare provider? Grandparents?)
7. How would you prefer to handle discipline? (e.g. Do you believe in spanking, time-outs, taking away privileges, etc.)
8. As a parent, what would you want to do differently than your family of origin?
9. How important is it to you that your children are reared near your extended family?
10. Do you believe children should be reared with some religious or spiritual foundation? What values do you hope to teach your children?

FOR COUPLES WITH CHILDREN:

PLANNING A WEEKLY FAMILY CONFERENCE

A family conference is a time for the family to connect and to reflect on recent family and personal experiences. Spending this time together helps family members feel supported and gives a new energy and sense of solidarity to the family system.

Guidelines:

- Be sure everyone who is old enough participates.
- Establish a regular time and place when the entire family is normally together.
- Encourage and share ideas. Do not criticize and critique.

FAMILY DISCUSSION:

1. What do you feel was the best thing that happened to you or within the family this week?
2. What was the worst thing that happened to you or within the family this week?
3. For an issue that was brought up in the previous question, what could have been done differently?
4. What is a strength of your family?



CHILDREN AND PARENTING

Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him. — PSALM 127:3

STEPFAMILIES: CHOOSING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Read through these common myths, noticing if any of them resonate with you and your partner. Use the questions in the Couple Discussion (below) to guide your discussion.

***Myth:* Because we love each other, the other family members will also love each other.**

Reality: Love and/or good relationships may or may not happen between stepfamily members. It will likely take time for emotional bonds to develop; some will bond quickly, others slowly, and it is possible that some individuals may never bond.

***Myth:* We'll do marriage better this time around.**

Reality: Those who have experienced a breakup or divorce often have learned tough lessons from the past. While a new marriage involves different people and different dynamics, it is not uncommon for individuals to slip into the same old patterns and routines (e.g., being avoidant during conflict). Be mindful not to repeat mistakes of the past.

***Myth:* Our children will feel as happy about this new family as we do.**

Reality: The truth is children will at best be confused about the new marriage and at worst, they'll resent it. Remarriage is a gain for adults and a challenge for children. Only after much time, when family stability is obtained, does the remarriage also become a gain for children. Be patient with them.

***Myth:* The stepparent(s) will quickly bond with the children and act like another parent.**

Reality: Sometimes stepparents want so badly to be accepted they try to manage the children as a parent would. They may also try to show affection like a biological parent would. Children often need some space initially to build a relationship with the stepparent. It is often a good idea to let the child set the pace and follow their lead.

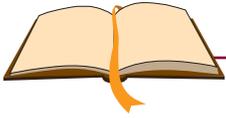
***Myth:* We will be able to easily form a new family.**

Reality: In most cases, children didn't ask for this new family, they need time to develop a history and sense of family. Don't push to create relationships. It is often better to have minimal expectations of how relationships will develop rather than grand expectations which may fail to materialize.

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

- 1. Which of these myths have you been tempted to believe?**
- 2. How could having these unrealistic expectations set you up for frustration and disappointment?**
- 3. How are you going to balance/prioritize the challenges of a stepfamily while also nourishing your couple relationship?**

Adapted from *The Smart Stepfamily: Seven Steps to a Healthy Family* by Ron L. Deal, Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers (2002).



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PARENTING

PSALM 127:3 Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him.

PROVERBS 22:6 Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.

PROVERBS 13:24 Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them.

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7 ⁶ And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. ⁷ Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.

EPHESIANS 6:1-2 ¹ Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. ² “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise.

COLOSSIANS 3:21 Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.

EXODUS 20:12 “Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

LEVITICUS 19:32 “Stand up in the presence of the elderly, and show respect for the aged. Fear your God. I am the Lord.

MATTHEW 19:13-15 ¹³ One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. ¹⁴ But Jesus said, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.” ¹⁵ And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.



COUPLE AND FAMILY MAPS

MAPPING YOUR RELATIONSHIP (see figure on next page)

In the computer report, there is a **Couple Map** which indicates how you each described your couple relationship and a **Family Map** which indicates how you each described your family of origin. These Maps are designed to help you better understand and discuss your couple relationship and families. The fact that families are so diverse can add to the challenge of merging individuals from two families into a couple relationship.

CLOSENESS: *Closeness refers to how emotionally connected you feel to your partner and family.* How do you balance separateness and togetherness? Indicators of closeness are I vs. We, loyalty, and independence vs. dependence. There are five levels of closeness. **Balanced levels** (3 central levels) of closeness are most healthy for couples and families, while the two **Unbalanced levels** (2 extreme ends) are more problematic.

FLEXIBILITY: *Flexibility refers to how open couples and families are to change.* How do you balance stability and change? Indicators of flexibility are leadership, relationship roles, discipline and rules. As with closeness, there are five levels of flexibility. **Balanced levels** (3 central levels) of flexibility are the most happy and healthy, while the two **Unbalanced levels** (2 extreme ends) are more problematic.

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

- Compare how you each described your couple relationship.
- Compare your family of origin with your partner's family on closeness and flexibility.
- Use the examples below to discuss the closeness and flexibility in your families of origin:

- Family gatherings during a holiday
- Celebrating a birthday or anniversary
- Dinner time / Meal time
- Handling discipline and parenting responsibilities
- Closeness in your parents marriage
- Flexibility in your parents marriage
- Caring for a sick family member
- Adjusting to a stressful change (e.g. a move, job transition).

- 1) How similar or different were your families in terms of closeness and flexibility?
- 2) How might the similarities or differences impact your current relationship?
- 3) What from your family of origin would you like to repeat in your couple relationship?
- 4) What from your family would you not like to repeat in your couple relationship?
- 5) How satisfied are you with the current level of closeness and flexibility in your couple relationship?
- 6) Consider ways you might increase or decrease closeness and flexibility (see next section for ideas).

Couple & Family Map



C L O S E N E S S

| | DISCONNECTED | SOMEWHAT CONNECTED | CONNECTED | VERY CONNECTED | OVERLY CONNECTED | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| OVERLY FLEXIBLE | UNBALANCED OVERLY FLEXIBLE | UNBALANCED OVERLY FLEXIBLE | UNBALANCED OVERLY FLEXIBLE | UNBALANCED OVERLY FLEXIBLE | UNBALANCED OVERLY FLEXIBLE | FLEXIBILITY INDICATORS CHANGE: Too much change LEADERSHIP: Lack of leadership ROLE SHARING: Dramatic role shifts DISCIPLINE: Erratic discipline |
| VERY FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | FLEXIBILITY INDICATOR CHANGE: Can change when necessary LEADERSHIP: Shared leadership ROLE SHARING: Role Sharing DISCIPLINE: Democratic discipline |
| FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | FLEXIBILITY INDICATORS CHANGE: Too little change LEADERSHIP: Authoritarian leadership ROLE SHARING: Roles seldom change DISCIPLINE: Strict discipline |
| SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE | BALANCED SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE TO VERY FLEXIBLE | |
| INFLEXIBLE | UNBALANCED INFLEXIBLE | UNBALANCED INFLEXIBLE | UNBALANCED INFLEXIBLE | UNBALANCED INFLEXIBLE | UNBALANCED INFLEXIBLE | |

BALANCED
 MID-RANGE
 UNBALANCED

| CLOSENESS INDICATORS | UNBALANCED | BALANCED | UNBALANCED |
|----------------------|---|---|--|
| "I" vs. "We" | Disconnected Too Much (I) Separateness | Somewhat Connected to Very Connected Good I-We Balance | Overly Connected Too Much (We) Togetherness |
| CLOSENESS | Little Closeness | Moderate to High Closeness | Too Much Closeness |
| LOYALTY | Lack of Loyalty | Moderate to High Loyalty | Loyalty Demanded |
| INDEPENDENCE | High Independence | Interdependent | High Dependency |



COUPLE AND FAMILY MAPS

CLOSENESS EXERCISES - PRACTICAL TIPS TO BALANCE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

If you find yourself **“Disconnected”** or **“Somewhat Connected”**, try one or more of these ideas to become more connected:

- Fill in the blanks. Use the following prompts (or some of your own) to discover or rediscover your partner’s innermost feelings. “I feel happy when _____”; “I am afraid of _____”; “If I had more time, I would _____”; “One of my favorite books is _____”; “One thing I have never told anyone is _____”; “I get really embarrassed when _____”; “My favorite meal is _____”;
- Say “No” to outside activities that take too much time and energy away from your relationship.
- Participate in community service or volunteering projects together.
- Start having a weekly “date” night.
- Plan and dream together. Create a list of things you would like to do in your life and share your list with your partner.
- Take a class or vacation together.
- Find a hobby or activity you can share with one another.
- Compliment your partner.

If you find yourself **“Overly Connected”** or **“Very Connected”**, try one or more of these ideas to build your independence:

- Maintain, create and nurture friendships with others.
- Take a class alone or with friends.
- Volunteer for something your partner is not involved with.
- Give yourself some alone time walking, jogging, or journaling. Get to know and like yourself. When your tank is full, you’ll have more to share with your partner later.



COUPLE AND FAMILY MAPS

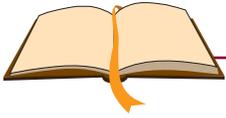
FLEXIBILITY EXERCISES - PRACTICAL TIPS TO BALANCE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

If you find yourself **“Inflexible”** or **“Somewhat Flexible”**, try one or more of these ideas to become more flexible:

- **Share leadership and roles.** If you and your partner have strictly defined roles and leadership patterns, try changing the normal routine.
- **Put away your lists, calendars, and schedules for a day.** Experience the day together without looking at a watch or clock.
- **Brainstorm a list of your roles, and expectations for your relationship.** Revise this list in a way that increases flexibility.
- **Switch roles with your partner for a week.** If your partner normally does the grocery shopping, make this your job for the week while your partner takes over one of your jobs.
- **Do something really spontaneous.** Clear your schedule for a day or week and use the time to meet your partner for a romantic getaway.

If you find yourself **“Overly Flexible”** or **“Very Flexible”**, try one or more of these ideas to add more stability:

- **Add more consistency, tradition and rituals.** Research has found rituals and routines are associated with higher marital satisfaction and stronger family relationships. Rituals create strong bonds and build loving relationships and are organizers of family life. Rituals are more than holidays and rites of passage—daily routines are also very important rituals for couples and families. Daily rituals include mealtime rituals, wake up and bedtime rituals, and everyday greetings and goodbyes.
- **Make a list of household tasks and who will do them.** Negotiate these with your partner.
- **Add more consistency to your parenting.**
- **Keep promises you made to your partner.**



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT FAMILY & FRIENDS

PROVERBS 27:9 The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:33 Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character."

PROVERBS 14:7 Stay away from fools, for you won't find knowledge on their lips.

PROVERBS 27:6 Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

PROVERBS 13:20 Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble.

JOHN 15:12-15 ¹² This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. ¹³ There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.



PERSONALITY

Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. — LUKE 6:37

SCOPE OUT YOUR PERSONALITY

Exploring your personality and your partner's personality can be a fascinating and fun process. It can also point out challenges for couples who love one another, but have very different personalities and approaches to life.

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

First, review the Personality SCOPE section of your computer report.

1. In what area(s) are your personalities similar?

- a. How can your similarities be a strength?
- b. How can your similarities create problems?

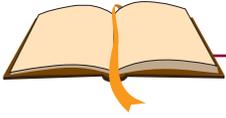
2. In what areas are your personalities different?

- a. How can your differences be a strength?
- b. How can your differences create problems?

3. Do the roles you fulfill in your relationship match your personality strengths? (e.g. Does the person who scored high on organization manage the checkbook?)

Dealing with Personality Differences

- Don't try to change your partner's personality. It won't work!
- Remember the positive aspects of your partner's personality that attracted you in the first place.
- Be responsible for yourself. Try to learn behaviors that will positively contribute to your relationship.
- How can you use your personality differences as a strength in your relationship?



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PERSONALITY ISSUES

2 PETER 1:5-6 ⁵ In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness.

PROVERBS 11:11-12 ¹¹ Upright citizens are good for a city and make it prosper, but the talk of the wicked tears it apart. ¹² It is foolish to belittle one's neighbor; a sensible person keeps quiet.

PROVERBS 11:13 A gossip goes around telling secrets, but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence.

PROVERBS 12:22 The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in those who tell the truth.

PROVERBS 25:19 Putting confidence in an unreliable person in times of trouble is like chewing with a broken tooth or walking on a lame foot.

PROVERBS 12:25 Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers a person up.

PROVERBS 17:22 A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.

MATTHEW 6:34 "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."

LUKE 6:37 "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven."

ROMANS 14:12-13 ¹² Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. ¹³ So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.



GOALS

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. — Romans 8:28

ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS...TOGETHER

Clarify and define your personal, couple, and family goals for the next few years. Then share them with your partner. Remember your goals should be realistic and clearly stated.

Partner 1 Goals

Personal Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Couple Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Family Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Partner 2 Goals

Personal Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Couple Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Family Goals

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

- Were you surprised by any of your partner's goals?
- Which goals are most important to you right now?
- What are the current issues surrounding these goals?
- How do your partner's goals complement or compete with yours?
- How can you each contribute to achieving these goals?
- What will be the first step to make this goal become a reality?

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