

Marriage

How to build strength and intimacy in marriage

Introduction

The marriage relationship was designed by God to be an adventure of love that lasts a lifetime. So say Nicky and Sila Lee in their book *The Marriage Book*. In order for this to happen then all of us who are married need to take time to honestly look at our marriages and identify areas of strength as well as areas we need to grow.

It is the hope of this study that whether you are in a stormy period in your marriage or experiencing inexpressible bliss, that what is contained here will help you build real intimacy and strength with your marriage partner.

Study 1.

Learn from your past

Introduction

Like it or not our parents have had a powerful impact on our lives. Our behaviour patterns, opinions, attitudes and faith are often reflect what we learned in the home where we were raised. We just need to be honest enough with our partner to recognise this, and to learn form the strengths of our history, and to earn form the pitfalls that our parents might have fallen into along the way, so that we do not follow the same path.

The Big picture

1. Tell of a time when you are your spouse discovered how differently you approach things?

The Biblical picture

Read *Genesis Ch 2 v21-25* and *Ephesians Ch 5 v 31-33*

2. Both of the above passages present three critical steps in the marriage process. What does it mean to

- a. leave our father and mother
- b. be united to our spouse
- c. become one flesh

The truth is that our families have had a powerful influence over us. Family dynamics determine our self-esteem and our self-confidence; family values shape our character with his in mind

3 how did your parents handle

- a. conflict
- b. expression of emotions
- c. celebration of special occasions such as birthdays, holidays
- d. discipline of children

4. Give at least one difference in your personalities that can be traced back to your family backgrounds. How has this become an issue in your marriage, and how are you seeking to deal with it?

5. What aspects of your parents' relationship do you respect and want to see imitated in your own marriage?

6. What is one characteristic that marked your parents' relationship that you want to avoid in your marriage?

7. What would it require for you to confront and avoid these same patterns?

8. How could you creatively thank or affirm your parents for the positive ways that they have impacted your life?

Being in the picture

9. Take time over this next week to talk to your spouse about an incident from your past where one or both of your parents did something that wounded you .

- a. how could it have been avoided?
- b. how have you recovered?
- c. Are there steps you need to take to continue the healing process?
- d. How do you plan to keep from repeating the same mistakes in your marriage?

Study 2.

Men are from Mars Women are from Venus

Introduction.

The way that men and women look and respond to issues can be at time quite different. This can create tensions in a marriage when we both have different response patterns and ways of looking at life. We just need to have an honesty about this, and recognise that some of the core parts of our personalities are different. We just need to understand each other's core patterns, so that we can all the more understand, love and communicate with each other.

The Big picture

1. What are some of the common beliefs and interests that first drew you to your spouse?

2. What is one difference between you and your spouse that you did not discover until after you were married? What are some of the consequences of this difference?

The Biblical picture

Read 2 Corinthians Ch 6 v 14-18

3. What do you think are the implications of this in marriage?

On the whole introverts think before they speak, say little, prefer a few close friends, would often prefer a quiet night in rather than a social get together. They may be warm, friendly, caring, but social interaction drains them so they like energised solitude. They need to get alone where they can relax, be themselves.

On the whole Extroverts, derive energy from interaction, they enjoy working, playing on a team, usually have many friends, they tend to talk a lot, they enjoy solitude occasionally, but too much drains them emotionally. They need the inspiration of interaction

4. After reading the above write down which best describes

- a. Your spouse
- b. Yourself.

5. On a scale of 1-10 where to do think in the areas above you have identified for your spouse and yourself you are both

- a. your spouses rating
- b. your own rating

6 How do these differences in personality reveal themselves in day- to-day life?

7. How can an awareness of these differences help you get along better with each other?

Initiators and responders. Initiators create ideas and action. They are aggressive and assertive and willing to confront, they tend to be outspoken, often loudly and quickly, they know how to take change and like to do it, they can seem overwhelming, but make on the whole excellent leaders.

Responders allow other peoples' ideas and actions to influence them, they are less assertive, and avoid confrontations whenever possible, they are cautious they tend to speak quietly, unemotionally, they listen carefully, avoid the use of power, and have a generally supportive attitude. Other view them as shy, but likeable.

8. After reading the above which

a. describes your spouse

c. yourself

and

what kind of rating would you give (1 being mild 10 being extreme)

a. your spouse

b yourself.

9. How do these differences in personality reveal themselves in day-to-day life?

Being in the picture

10. Explain to your group how your deeper understanding of personality differences will help strengthen your marriage. How might learning about others in your group help all of you build a deeper community and authentic relationships?

11. We have looked at common interests, beliefs that originally attracted you to your spouse. Identify a couple of these interests and with your spouse discuss how you pursue them today?

12. Identify new interests that you have in common. What can you do to spend time pursuing one of these interests together over the coming month?

Study 3.

Planning for peace

Introduction.

Conflicts in relationships happen. This is true of all relationships, and especially true in marriage. When you put two people together from different backgrounds, from different families, there will always be tensions and potential problems. The question is not if there will be tensions and struggles in marriage. The real issue is, when they come, how will we respond and deal with them? We need to work on conflict resolution guidelines. We need to identify negative patterns of conflict resolutions, resist them, and also to develop healthy patterns as to how to deal with conflict in a marriage setting.

The Big picture

1. What would you say to an engaged couple who claimed to never fight and who were confident that would continue for their whole marriage?

2. Tell a time, if you dare, during your dating courtship experiences when it was not smooth sailing?

The Biblical picture

Read Ephesians Ch 4 v 25-26

3. Why is speaking the truth so critical for healthy relationships?

4. Reflect back on a time when you failed to speak the truth. What consequences did you experience?

5. The Apostle Paul does not say that anger is wrong, However he does warn about sin that comes from anger. He speaks about not allowing the sun to go down on your anger. Why is following this teaching essential for a healthy marriage?

6. How can refusing to follow God's teaching on how to handle anger, and instead, just keeping it inside, giving the devil a foothold?

7. How did your parents deal with conflict and anger in their relationship?

8. How do you deal with conflict and anger in your marriage?

We all need the key antidote to marital frustration, a spirit of reconciliation. Which require three things
Firstly to acknowledge that each of us fall short of what is a moral standard which God sets for us
Secondly that God meets us in his rich mercy, through Jesus Christ]
Thirdly, when we recognise steps one and two, then because of divine reconciliation it begins to make it easier for us to practice reconciliation in our human relationships, and especially marriage

9. Why are the first two steps of this above process necessary for the third to become a reality in our lives?

Being in the picture

10. This may be a stretch for your marriage. How do you feel about taking the risk of engaging in an honest, truth telling relationship in your marriage?

11. How can your small group function as a place where you can gain counsel, advice, and accountability for your marriage?

12. What kind of ground rules could you set out about how you will conduct your peace talks in the future? How about the following as a guide

1. we will always pray as we begin to talk about concerns
2. we will seek to come to this time with a spirit of reconciliation
3. we will be willing to look where we have fallen short ourselves.
- 4 we will always begin with affirming our love and our commitment to our marriage
5. we will seek to express hurt and not hostility
- 6 we will seek to communicate clearly
7. we will seek to express feelings and not assign blame
- 8 we will seek the help and assistance of committed Christian friends as needed

You want to adapt the above, or add more.

Study 4

Maintaining romance in a marriage

Introduction

We all expect to be as madly in love with our spouse not just on our wedding day but also for years to come. The problem is that so many couples find a whole different experience. As the years go on so the romance seems to wane. Our intentions are good, but we often forget to put the effort into developing an exciting and romantic marriage. The basic inertia of life drags us down, and romance is one of the first things to go. We just need to identify some of the things that sap the excitement and romance out of marriage, and move towards a more romantic and fulfilling married relationship

The Big picture

1. Take a moment to rate the romance factor during the following times of your relationship with your spouse. Rate each one from 1 to 10 (10 being strongly romantic 1 being virtually no romance)
 - a. during your first year of dating
 - b. during your engagement
 - c. during your first year of marriage
 - d. at present
2. What factors have contributed to the changes in your ratings?
3. What feelings arise as you view these changes?

The Biblical picture

Read Songs of Songs Ch 4

4. This book of the Bible is one of the greatest love songs ever written. It expresses the depth of romance, intimacy, and friendship that most only dream of having in marriage. What kind of feelings do you experience when you read this passage?
5. How do you think God feels about romantic passionate love between a husband and a wife?
6. There are 'romance busters.' Here are a few.
The curse of familiarity.
The twisted sense of security. We stop working on the aspect of romance when we feel 'we have our prize', it's secure, so we stop working on the romance

Physical exhaustion

Too many responsibilities

Financial burdens. Money tensions often result in marriage tensions.

6. Take a moment to reflect on these romance busters. Ask the question 'Is this a factor in my marriage at this time. Very much so/ some/ not at all?

Feeling things have become too familiar

Feeling over secure

Physical exhaustion

Too many responsibilities

Financial burdens too familiar

7 Are there any additional 'romance busters' you have experienced?

8. If you have had to answer honesty' very much' on four of five more of the above, what can you do to get some of these items off your list and move towards a more romantic marriage relationship?

Being in the picture

9. Take few minutes to reflect on the following

a. what were some of the things I did during my courtship and engagement that I stopped doing after I got married?

b. what promises did I make to my spouse before we got married that I have failed to follow through on after we were married?

c. If I have wronged my spouse in either of these ways, what can I do to make it right?

10. If you 'shifted gears' after your marriage and feel that you might have hurt your spouse in this process, take some time to admit that you recognise your mistakes and let your spouse know you are sorry

11. If you have not followed through on promises made to your spouse, what are you going to do to make this right and be a person of your word?

12. What new commitments have you made to each other that you would feel comfortable telling your group about?

Study 5

Re-building romance

Introduction

It is I believe always possible to re-build battered romance, and always possible to fan into flame the smouldering embers of dying feelings, provided there is a willing commitment from both partners to the challenge. I think that the love that drew a couple together in the first place into courtship can be recaptured and sustained in spite of the disappointments and setbacks and stormy weather that all marriages go through. The road back may not be easy. The flames may well have burned down, but there are ways to fan them back into a fire, there just needs to be a commitment from the couple, as well as some guidelines to follow.

The big picture

1. As you look back on your courtship and marriage, what are some of the moments you remember with fondness?
2. What are some of the experiences and struggles you are thankful to have made it through?

The Biblical picture

Read 1 Corinthians Ch 7 v 3-5

3. What does this passage teach about sexual expression in the marriage relationship?
4. The Apostle Paul says that after a couple have been apart for a time they should come together again. One reason for this exhortation is so that Satan will not tempt them.
What problems and temptations can a couple face when they refrain from sexual intimacy for prolonged periods of time?
5. When is it appropriate for a couple to abstain from sexual intimacy?

Feelings grow best out of conversation. Romance build through knowledge, which builds through talking together. When we stop talking the flame of romance begins to die. When we talk together it ignites again.

6. When are some of the times in your day or week that you and your spouse naturally find time to talk together?

7. What topics tend to dominate your conversation?

8. What can you do to spend more time talking together?

If the romance of your marriage has suffered a near deadly blow, your conversation will undoubtedly have to begin by focusing on hidden hostilities.

9. Why is it critical to deal with hurt feelings and talk about them rather than try to bury them?

Being in the picture

To rebuild romance in a relationship we need to be creative. Here are a few suggestions for you.

- a. write your spouse a short love letter about how you can begin to rekindle your romance
- b. call your spouse in the day with the single purpose of saying 'I love you'
- c. communicate love with non-sexual touching, a hug, kiss, just holding hands, with no expectation of further intimacy
- d. give unexpected gifts
- e. be creative in going out together
- f. find opportunities to serve each other.
- g. encourage and inspire your spouse, be your mate's fan.

10. Which of the above would most communicate love to you and why?

11. Tell about one of the most memorable dates you and your spouse have had?

For some people the language of love is touch. For others it is verbal expression, for others it is a small gift, for others it is spending time together.

12.

a. What is that speaks the language of love to you?

b. How does it feel to hear that language?

c. What do you think speaks the language of love most clearly to your spouse?

d. What can you do in the coming days to speak the language of love loudly and clearly to your spouse?

Study 6.

How to cope when we feel we are living in crisis in our marriage

Introduction

We speak of it as 'our Achilles heel' that small spot which was on the weakness of the mythical Greek warrior, and resulted in his downfall. The wise amongst us recognise our weakness and our vulnerability and are careful to protect it from attack, the unwise leave their weak spot exposed, and are downed in battle.

Our Achilles heel follows us into our marriage, and can nag us. We live in a very driven society, and in our marriage we can live with the RPMs of our life into the red most of the time. We need to learn how to slow down, and recognise that God is in control, and discover a pace of life, which is suited to our marriage.

In this study we shall have a look at how we discover personal healing, and get the balance back into our marriage

The big picture

1. Tell about a time in your life when you felt your schedule and life were so busy that you had to slow down or you feared you would burn out?
2. What can you do about your schedule to slow down the pace of your life at this time in your life?

The biblical picture

Read Psalm 46

3. What picture does this Psalm paint of what life can be like?
4. According to this Psalm, how can followers of Christ find peace and clam in the midst of the storm?
5. This Psalm talks about troubles, the earth giving way, mountains falling. What are some of the things in your life and schedule at this time that make your life stressful?
6. what do you do that contributes to that stress?

Crisis mode living is when you spend every waking moment of every day trying to figure out how to keep all the balls in the air and all the plates spinning.

7. What are some of the potential consequences of keeping the RPMs of your life pegged in the red for too long?

- a.in your spiritual life
- b.in your relationships with your spouse and with your children
- c.in your physical health
- d.in your emotional health

The emotional depletion that results from living in crisis mode eventually produces a shrinking and hardening heart. It is no longer sensitive to either God or others, and has lost the fire of compassion.

- 8a. How have you seen your heart shrink and grow hard during times you have stayed in crisis mode for too long?
- b. How did these feelings affect your marriage?
- c. what helped you turn this around and grow more tender-hearted again?

Being in the picture

To recharge the battery in a car you can either have the quick charge, from a pair of jump leads, attached to another car. Or remove the battery from the car and keep it on a slow charge for several hours. The quick charge if used to frequently will burn out the plates in the battery. The slow trickily charge is best, for the longevity of he battery

- 9.a What recharges your batteries and brings freshness to your life?
- b.what can you do in the coming months to incorporate more of this into your lifestyle?

- 10a.What tends to drain your batteries and leave you depleted?
- b.how can you take some of these things out of your schedule in the coming month?

11.If you are living in a crisis mode at this time, or if you sense that you are heading towards a crisis mode, what specific things can you do to downshift before things get worse?

12. How can you ask the members of your group to help you? And how can they hold you to make wise choices, and set appropriate lifestyle priorities