

# *Building Healthy Relationships*



Enriching and Fulfilling God's Promises

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# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
A Christian Prospective on Marriage.....	5
Oneness in Marriage.....	5
Permanence to Marriage.....	5
Beliefs and Expectations.....	7
Miscellaneous Marriage Information.....	9
Premarital Risk Factors Results.....	11
Risk Factors in Marriage.....	12
Prevention.....	13
Forgiveness.....	14
Filters in Communication.....	15
Effective Communication Styles.....	17
Hidden Issues.....	19
Problem Solving.....	21
Commitment.....	23
Sex.....	24
Suggested Books on Sex.....	26
Suggested Goals for a Successful Marriage.....	27

# ***Building Healthy Relationships***

Everyone desires for their relationships to be positive and fulfilling, yet we do little to guarantee our relationships will be lasting and healthy. There are many reasons why one assumes their relationships will always remain strong but in reality, every relationship will be tested. Wise couples will choose to find ways to make their relationships more fulfilling. Those who allow their relationship to merely exist, find themselves disillusioned, hurt, and many times heading for destruction.

This course is designed to provide the tools necessary to overcome adversities and differences as well as providing positive reinforcement to make your relationship a success. Our study is research-based using reality and cognitive/behavioral techniques.

This course is beneficial to all forms of relationships, whether married or dating. Marriage is mentioned more in our outline due to the overall numbers of couples who are married. This outline can be very informative to those who are dating or are planning to be married in the future.

## ***Marriage***

### ***Why is there such a problem?***

#### **Three Facts of Marriage**

1. The vast majority of people desire happy lasting marriages, whether rich or poor, male or female, regardless of cultural background.
2. There is evidence that people (and society) benefit when those, who chose marriage for themselves, are able to build and maintain marriages. (economic, longevity) Cohabiting is not a marriage!
3. As a culture, we become deeply ambivalent about marriage. We desire it, yet we fear it; we approach it, yet we will pull away; we want a successful and happy marriage, yet we do little to improve it. Most couples will let things run their course. How sad!

In order to have a successful marriage/relationship, one must consider and realize two important absolutes before receiving any instruction on relationships:

- ❑ ***We are all different.*** You are different from your spouse and he or she is different from you. Both have different backgrounds, beliefs, and ideas of what a marriage should look like. (**5 love languages**)
- ❑ ***Every marriage/relationship has problems and disagreements.*** No one is immune from marital problems and your problems are not unique

or different from any others. It is how you handle them that count the most! "What you fight about is not as important as how you fight"

All marriages and relationships will have its ups and downs. Everyone thinks different from each another, expressing our individual thoughts and emotions in different ways, are usually raised in different environments, and usually have different belief and value systems. The **first step** in improving your relationship is to understand that your spouse will not necessarily think, act, feel, and understand in the same ways you do.

**Secondly**, God has made everyone all uniquely different! What a blessing! Each person is full of ideas, strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs that can greatly benefit any relationship. A good relationship will take advantage of these, respecting one another's opinions and thoughts, while relying on each other's strengths and abilities. Too often couples magnify the differences as being major barriers, when in fact, weneed to embrace those differences because we need each other's strengths for support and balance.

**Example:** Children often become angry at one another. They may even state that they will never play with their friend again, only to go back to playing with them later on that day. They realize the important of their friendship and not mainly focusing on their differences.

God has never intended for man and woman to be alone. Whenever one is weak, the other one should be strong, relying on each other's strengths. A successful marriage relies upon those strengths and abilities in order to survive and have a fulfilling marriage. The important thing to realize is that our marriages can be fulfilling when couples use each other's strengths. Those who do not benefit from each other's strengths will find themselves struggling in a less than perfect relationship.

**Thirdly**, men and women are physically and mentally made up differently. Men are generally more physical and logical while women are more emotional and compassionate. This does not mean that women are weak or cannot use logic or that men cannot show emotions or have compassion.

**Example:** (Take a look at your finger nails). Most men will look at their nails with fingers bent over towards them while most women look at their nails with the backside of their hands with fingers apart. Does that mean if a man looks at his nails like most of the females, is he feminine? No. And vice a versa. Which is the best way to look at your nails? Answer: Who cares as long as you are able to look at them.

**Fourthly**, every relationship must work as a team. A relationship involves "two", not one. There is strength in numbers. Together, you can bind, agree, and work together for a common cause—to make your relationship the very best God intended your relationship/marriage to be. There should always be "we in a marriage, not "me". (Refer to section on oneness) **"We may go to work individually and do things individually but when we come home, we are a team!"**

# **A Christian Perspective on Marriage**

A Christian marriage is one that both partners (man and woman) seek to follow God's design for their lives and their relationship. Marriage is viewed as a covenant before God and man creating a bond of unity in which no one can separate. **"What God has joined together, let no one separate."** It is a strong bond, a bond of love. When both partners are joined together with God, this bond of unity is powerful and fulfilling.

*"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."*  
*Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (KJV)*

Covenants are listed throughout the Bible. They are basically promises or agreements designed to be permanent or law. It was created to be a permanent union between God and His people. A covenant between man and woman concerning marriage is considered to be a permanent union before God, one that is sacred and lasting.

*Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. Malachi 2:14 (KJV)*

Marriage is honorable. *Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled; (Hebrews 13:4).* Marriage should have mutual enjoyment and happiness, which includes a sexual relationship and child bearing. It is the foundation for childbearing and the creation of a family. Marriage consists of their own husband and wife (monogamous), maintaining that fidelity in their covenant before God. 1 Corinthians 7:2-5).

The Lord created man and woman, blessed them both, saying *"Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth"* (Genesis 1:26-28). When God created man, He felt that it was not good for man to be alone, knowing that he needed to have a companion through marriage, being of **one flesh** or creating a **oneness**.

## **Oneness and Marriage**

*Genesis 2:24-25, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." (NIV)*

It is interesting to note that both Adam and Eve started out being naked and unashamed. They felt comfortable without any type of shame or guilt. It was a permanent union that God had created. Just as Jesus had spoken to the idea of oneness:

*Matthew 19:4-6, "Haven't you read", He replied," that at the beginning the Creator' made them male and female,' and said 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (NIV)*

Adam and Eve did not know of their vulnerability until sin came into their lives. They were innocent, truly in God's plan and purpose. When God creates "oneness", there are no divisions that will come and separate that relationship unless people allow sin to drive a wedge between both parties, opening the eyes of innocence breaking down the intimacy, trust, and foundation upon which all relationships were built.

The fundamental foundation that stresses God's desire to have all marriages to be that "one flesh", to have a secure and lasting relationship (permanent), and have the type of relationship that is open before each other and to God.

*Ephesians 5:31-32, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church." (NIV).*

This oneness is more than coming together for a marriage or common purpose. The two coming together is a matter of the heart, one of commitment, a team effort, and being unified. We can be unified as one:

- In Christ. Even though we are separate individuals, we come together as members of the body.
- In Commitment. We are working as a team, separating ourselves from the intimacy of others, forming a strong union before each other and God.
- In our unique nature. We don't have to follow a certain plan or model that others have set out but have our own set of unique traits and ideas that create this union.
- In spirit, intellect, physical, and emotional.

### **Permanence is God's Design**

**God takes marriage seriously** and designed it to be permanent and satisfying. Many couples never enter into all of what God has planned for their marriage. There should be no fear of intimacy. Relationships must be characterized by love, commitment, and safety to help each other. Each marriage should provide safety to **communicate** and be able to **interact** with each other with the day-to-day activities and provide the safety needed in **commitment** to bring about the stability for the future investment with each other.

**Sin** can cause division in a marriage and is ultimately the root of relational struggles...**we all have this problem!SELFISHNESS.** We basically do what we want to do. Divorce among Christians is basically no different from that of non-Christians. While Christians openly state that they love and forgive one another, they have great difficulty in showing those same traits to their spouse. Today's Christian may use excuses to justify their actions, not based on the **Word**, but how they feel (selfish desires). Every Christian should be asking God for help and endeavor to walk by His Word! If we were to truly walk by His Word, our walk would be different!

Another problem is that we **lack knowledge of how to do better in our marriage.** Many lack the knowledge of how to be intimately close to one another and remain close. Other times, couples may spend a lot of energy in solving marital problems, but are unknowledgeable in knowing how to cultivate and be close in a relationship. A lot of people, including Christians, have a difficult time with intimacy and commitment as well as the idea of becoming "**as one**" (oneness), instead of being one (selfishness).

### **Beliefs and Expectations for how marriage should be or expect to be.**

We all have beliefs and expectations for how your partner should behave or for the way you want things to be in your relationship. Some of these may be very critical, some of them are being held strongly because you have learned them somewhere that they are important, such as in your family growing up. The degree to which these expectations are met or not met directly and powerfully affects your degree of satisfaction in this relationship.

Some people are unaware of these crucial expectations or if they are aware of them, they are not clearly expressed to their partner. For example, if your father consistently took care of your mother at all times, even in turmoil, you expect the same. Some have been raised in alcoholic homes where the father drank all the money and yet told his family that he loved them. When a partner spends money on something non-essential in an act of love, the other one does not feel the same way because it may be hurting the needs of the family. Others may have been raised in homes where love was openly shared and witnessed through hugs and kisses while your mate may not have ever seen that but somehow knew that family loved one another.

Un-communicated expectations can lead to frustration and disappointment. When one sees this in his/her partner or is experiencing this themselves, it is best to step back, wait a minute, and ask what is wrong or ask what is expected or is needed.

Another unexpressed expectation is in the area of sexual satisfaction. Professionals get a bit perturbed when hearing one person repeatedly tell the other "you should know what turns me on" when they have never really come out and told their partner what it is that they desire. It is hard to work as a



team, in the same direction, for the same goals if expectations are hidden or never stated.

Some important questions that partners should ask of each other are:

1. The longevity of this relationship? "Till death do us part?"
2. Sexual fidelity?
3. Love? Do you expect to love each other always? Do you expect this to change over time?
4. Your sexual relationship? Frequency? Practices? Taboos?
5. Romance? What is romantic to you?
6. Children? Or more children?
7. Children from previous marriages? If you and your partner have children from a previous marriage, where do you want them to live? How do you expect that you should share in the discipline of these children?
8. Work, careers, or provisions of income? Who will work in the future? Whose career/job is more important should transfer take place?
9. The degree of emotional dependency on the other? Do you want to be taken care of and how? How do you expect to be able to rely on each other to get through tough times?
10. Basic approach to life? As a team? As two independent individuals?
11. Loyalty? What does that mean to you?
12. Communication about problems in the relationship? Do you want to talk these out, and if so, how?
13. Power? Who do you expect will have more power in what kinds of decisions. For example, who will control the money or who will discipline the kids?
14. Household tasks? Who do you expect to do what? How much housework will each of you will do in the future? If together, how does the current breakdown here match up with what you ideally expect?
15. Time together? How much time do you want to spend together (versus friends, family, work, etc.)?
16. Sharing feelings? How much of what you are each feeling do you expect to be shared?
17. Friendship with your partner? What is a friend? What would it mean to maintain a friendship with your partner?
18. Forgiveness? How important is forgiveness in your relationship?
19. Little things in life? Where do you squeeze the toothpaste? Is the toilet seat left up or down?

### **Spiritual Beliefs and Expectations:**

For many people, religious faith or spiritual orientation reflects or determines core philosophical, moral, and cultural beliefs and practices. It is very important for one to understand one another's spiritual background, beliefs, and expectations. Couples who have widely divergent religious backgrounds to which they are committed, are at greater risk for divorce (Spilka, Hood, &



Gorsuch, 1985). No matter how similar or different, dealing directly with your beliefs and expectations should be beneficial.

Questions for reflection:

1. What is your faith/spiritual beliefs? What do you believe?
2. How did you come to believe in this faith/spiritual belief?
3. What is the meaning or purpose of life in your faith/spiritual belief?
4. What was your faith/spiritual belief growing up? How was that practiced in your family of origin?
5. What are some of your core assumptions or beliefs about life as they relate to your faith/spiritual belief?
6. What is the meaning of marriage in your faith/spiritual belief?
7. What vows will you say, or what vows did you say? How did these tie into your faith/spiritual belief?
8. What is your belief on divorce? How does that fit into your faith/spiritual belief?
9. How do you expect to practice your faith and beliefs? How often?
10. What would you like the day-to-day impact of your faith or belief to be on your relationship?
11. Are there specific views on sexuality to your faith or belief?
12. How do you expect to raise your children? Will they be raised according to your faith/spiritual belief?
13. Do you give or expect to give financial support to your religious institution (church or synagogue, etc.)? How will this be determined? Do both agree?
14. How does forgiveness play in your relationship and faith/spiritual beliefs?
15. Do you see any potential areas of conflict regarding your faith/spiritual beliefs? What are they?

### **Miscellaneous information:**

The prime opportunity for marriage education is 6-9 months after the wedding.

Learning over a longer period of time is superior to short programs (16 hour weekend is better than 2 hour meetings spread over 8 weeks).

### **Complaints**

Before Marriage: Money, Communication

After Marriage: Money, Sex

Women say about men...Doesn't listen to me...Don't listen.

Men say about women...Talk too much...Nag...Fight too much.

Men don't want to talk about the issues

Women talk more...Men fight less

If men are not connected to wife, they will not be connected to the children.

Kids do not care if parents do not love one another but they do care if they fight. Those children have a hard time in future marriages, relationships, and life when divorce seems to "just happen" (by surprise). The ratio is 2-1 that low conflict marriages are the bulk of divorces. The children often blame themselves for parents getting the divorce.

### **What would it take to help more couples attain "success" in marriage?**

- An increase in confidence that success is possible.
- An increase understanding of the benefits.
- An increase ability to make a good choice about their partner.
- An increase ability (skills, attitudes, and expectations) to be a good mate to one's partner.
- Decrease the policies that punish marriage.

### **Suggestion:**

If something you know hurts your marriage...then stop!!!

A child once told his dad, "My elbow hurts when I bend it." Do you know what the dad said? He said, "Then don't bend it."

It sounds so simple...stop the things you know that hurt your marriage! Stopping can be hard because we have not been taught the skills and tools needed to have a successful marriage. This outline was written to supply skills and tools needed for a successful marriage.

### **Other Information:**

**Maintain friendship in marriage**  
**Have fun in your marriage**  
**The blessings of marriage—sexuality**  
**Spirituality in marriage**

### **Cohabitation**

People who live together previously did not do well in marriages. Most young people (60%) believe cohabitation is better to test before marriage but statistics are opposite.

**One reason of thinking** to promote cohabitation is that once you are married, it is harder to break up a relationship.

**Question:** Do you really want to live with a person who you are not really committed to in the first place?

## ***Pre-marital Sex***

More partners before marriages cause higher risks. People who think pre-marital sex is wrong but does it anyway, adds a bigger risk for future divorce, not counting others factors, such as AIDS, etc. One person is usually pushing harder to get what they want instead of respecting the other person. Disrespect of boundaries.

**One problem with young people** is that they may dissociate sex with bonding. This could play a factor in future relationships.

### **Premarital Risk Factors Associated with Couple Background**

<b><i>Risk Factors</i></b>	<b><i>Highest Risk</i></b>	<b><i>Moderate Risk</i></b>	<b><i>Low Risk</i></b>
Age—Males Females	Younger than 20 Younger than 20	Ages 21-23 Age 21	Older than 24 Older than 22
Education	Not finished H.S.	H.S./Trade	Post H.S. Degree
Pregnancy	Premarital-Yes		Premarital-No
Preparation Time	2 months or less	3-5 months	6 months or more
Length of Acquaintance	Less than 11 months	Between 12-23 months	More than 2 years
Dating Experience	Idealistic	Mixed	Realistic
Personality	Immature	Mixed	Mature
Parent's Attitude towards Marriage	Opposed or Negative	Neutral	Enthusiastic
Income	Low, dependent	Almost independent	Enough Income
Family Atmosphere	Worry, discomfort	Mixed	Comfortable
Parent's Marital Status	Divorced or remarried	Separated	Married
Social Behavior	Trouble with friends	Mixed	Like Friends
Conflict Resolution	Avoid Problems	Mixed	Confront problems
Decision Making	Rigid/Forced	Mixed	Flexible, negotiate
Attitude Towards Counseling/Prep	Negative	Mixed	Positive

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# ***Risk Factors***

By knowing what best **PREDICTS** divorce and refraining from those, allows everyone to prevent serious problems within their marriage and encourage them to have a more successful relationship. How one communicates and handles conflict is crucial for how their marriages will go.

***While researchers may agree there is no special formula that will guarantee a successful marriage, they all agree there are warning signs not to follow:***

## **DANGER SIGNS:**

**CRITICISM:** Everyone may have criticism in their relationship but it is the measure criticism that is important. Is one criticizing more than one's praising? Negative statements, using "you always" or "you never" are terms often used whenever conversations become escalated to a high measure—negative-to-negative comments. If escalation continues, this could lead to verbal and physical aggression. Women criticize more than men.

- Successful couples don't escalate as easily.
- Successful couples exit negative cycles more quickly when they do get into them.
- Successful couples understand that each can disagree but should become disagreeable.

**DEFENSIVENESS:** Many become defensive whenever arguments start. Being defensive is a natural reaction but whenever arguments become more escalated, many will justify their actions and not consider the other's feelings and emotions. When this happens, the **oneness** starts to separate. Both men and women are guilty of this.

- Successful couples understand that the other can have different ideas but controls the emotional state so that the other can communicate those differences.
- Successful couples will give each other the benefit of the doubt knowing that there is a **oneness** instead of selfishness.

**STONEWALLING:** Whenever escalation or arguments occur, many will pull back, withdraw, put up a stonewall in between each other. This is to avoid the issues at hand. Men stonewall more than women. Some researchers state one reason is that men want to avoid arguments and others state that men have a hard time in changing their rules or admitting they can be wrong with their views. Either way, stonewalling does not allow for proper dialog for understanding each other better. Refusing to deal with the issues at hand is refusing God's design for oneness!

**CONTEMPT:** This occurs whenever escalation brings about invalidation. It is more than just being insensitive to your partner's feelings. It has escalated to a point where insults occur or putting down what your partner says or does. The "YOU" statements, such as, "You're Stupid" or "You Can't Do Anything Right," etc. This is the most damaging of all the danger signs!!!

***While the danger signs are found in every divorce, the first three are also found in successful marriages! Successful marriages limit the first three to a minimum and have concentrated more on the positives instead of the negatives. They also avoid the area of contempt!!!***  
***Contempt is a killer to any marriage!***

### **OTHER FACTORS TO INCLUDE:**

**REPAIR ATTEMPTS:** While all marriage have some forms of criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling, successful marriages will focus of repair attempts after arguments or misunderstandings. Repair attempts are ways in which each partner will attempt to improve or correct his/her differences in a positive way. His/her emphasis is knowing that their oneness of love and commitment is foremost in their marriage and endeavoring to restore anything that can separate their love and affection they have for one another. The more repair attempts made, the more your partner understands that you really care for them.

*Proverbs 29:11 says, "A fool gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back." (NIV)*

*Proverbs 12:18 says, "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."*

## ***Prevention***

**5 to 1 POSITIVE-TO-NEGATIVE RATIO:** Many researchers state that all marriages will have negative circumstances from time to time. It is important to note that any relationship must have more positives than negatives! The more one put into their relationship, the more valuable it is. It is like money in the bank. Whenever there are negative things happen in one's relationship, they work as a withdrawal. One hopes there is still a positive balance in his/her emotional account after any negative occurrences. These positives may include:

- Touch, kiss, or any affection.
- A look, nod, or some type of validation that one is being heard.
- A smile, wink, or expression of love.
- Helping the other one out without being asked to.
- Cards, notes, gifts, or something special.
- Anything courteous or kind for the other.

These are just a few examples. It is not about buying something special for your partner, it is about displaying something positive, just showing you **care**,

**are interested in them, you are interested in what they say and do, and that they are special!**

**If you don't give attention to your spouse, then someone else will!!!** We are not to be ignorant of Satan's devices! Protect what you have. Value what is most precious!

## ***Forgiveness***

**Forgiveness:** The restoration of Oneness. Many marriages have been destroyed by the accumulation damage from resentment and a lack of forgiveness. This sets up a barrier to oneness. A lack of forgiveness precludes restoration of the relationship, whether between spouses or people and God. Forgiveness is critical for maintaining oneness. The Lord stressed forgiveness over and over as a matter of honoring Him and relating to one another. There is probably no greater expression of love in marriage than forgiveness. When we consider Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, then we will forgive in our marriage.

*Mark 11:25 says, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."*

It is vital to one's Christian beliefs and way of life, to forgive so that we may be forgiven. Forgiving others means forgiving your spouse. ***But Forgiving does not mean forgetting or trusting.*** It is a point of release of any damage or anything done to us by someone else. We may still remember and it may take time to trust again, but we won't hold onto resentment, hurt, feelings of hate and wanting to punish our partner of what they have done to us. Forgiveness is turning the situation over to God and trusting him to bring restoration to your relationship.

**Forgiveness vs. Forgetting or Trust:** In many situations, small injustices can be forgiven or forgotten very easily. It goes back to the **5-1 positive-to-negative ratio** that was stated earlier. If there are enough positives in a relationship, they will outweigh the negatives during the course of that relationship.

But many people confuse forgiveness for trust. So many people who have wronged a spouse through infidelity or some other extreme injustice have often stated, "If you really forgive me then you will forget and trust me now." I totally disagree with that type of logic! Jesus stated for us to forgive but he also rebuked the tree that produced no fruit. It is important for us to have the ability to forgive for our own sake but it is also important to the person who is forgiven to show remorse and change. If someone continues to be hurt, either through verbal, physical, or emotional abuse, it is hard for them to trust that person again. ***It takes time to trust again.*** People are known by their fruit. If someone is truly genuine and willing to come back in that **"oneness"**, then over time, true restoration may take place. We have to trust God and acknowledge

Him in all His ways, which means change. Forgiveness is not forgetting or trusting, nor is it harboring ill-feelings and hatred toward each other, no matter what they may have done. **God is in the restoration business!!!** I believe He will bring restoration if we submit to His will.

*Defining forgiveness:*

**Matthew 6:12, "Forgive (amphiemi) us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors."**

**Mark 11:25, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven forgive you your sins."**

Greek word *amphiemi* is to send away, to give up, to keep no longer, to let go...

Reasons to forgive:

1. Jesus commanded this. (Mark 11:25)
2. Not doing so hinders our relationship with God. Puts us out of fellowship with Him. (Mark 11:25)
3. Because we have experienced God's **GRACE**.
4. It is a powerful way to be like Christ. (Colossians 3:13)
5. Forgiveness frees us for restored relationship!

**Framework for Forgiveness:**

1. Set agenda to work on issues in question.
2. Pray together for the Lord to bless your time discussing this issue.
3. Explore the pain and concerns related to this issue for both.
4. Show respect.
5. Use good communication skills to discuss issues.
6. Offender ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift, it is not assumed or expected. Trust is also earned!
7. Offended agrees to forgive by agreeing to commit the issue to the past with no attempts to get even or provide evil to the other party. It is also not holding a debt.
8. Pray together for strength and peace and grace to release the issue and not make it a barrier between you both.

# ***Communication***

**Filters in Communication and Perception**

There are a number of different "filters" that block effective communication. Most couples think they are communicating well enough for anyone to

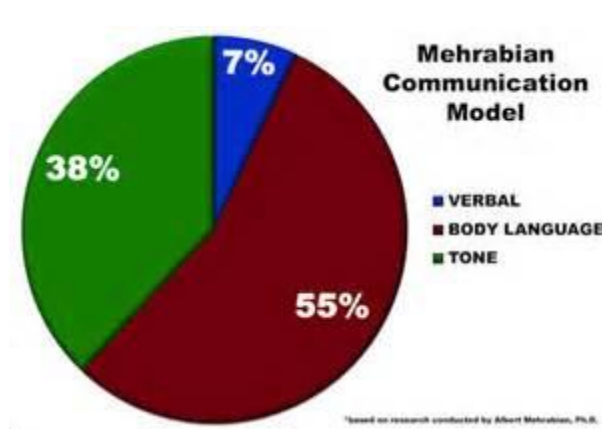


understand their meaning of what is being said but in reality, we all perceive, vision, understand, and sort in our “own little world”.

When a person is communicating, he/she is sending a number of words to another person who is trying to sort out the meanings through a series of mental pictures. During this process, other factors can distort or hinder one’s effectiveness in communication.

Listed below are a few of these factors:

**Placing too much emphasis on verbal communication.** Albert Mehrabian, Ph.D. from UCLA, listed the basic elements of communication as Nonverbal, Verbal, and Tone. Most of the credibility, beliefs, and perceptions come from nonverbal communication (55%). He states that 38% of our communication comes from tone, and only 7% comes from actual words but most people will argue and fight over what is being said rather than how it is being said or the body language of the person giving it.



**Inattention.** Many problems with communication come from hearing and speech problems, noise in their environment (TV, etc.), or just being too pooped to communicate well.

**Emotional states and reactions.** Anger, sadness, happiness, fear, embarrassment can and will affect the way we receive or give out in communication. We give others more or less benefit of the doubt depending on our moods.

**Beliefs and expectations.** Beliefs can affect how things are being interpreted. Many people have a tendency to see others by what we expect to see, or for them to behave in the way they expect them to behave, many times expecting the worst in the other person.

**Communication styles.** We should be tolerant for our partner is different from us.

**Self-protection.** There are people who say things to protect themselves from hurt or rejection, perhaps covering their real concerns and feelings.

To deal with these filters, we must take responsibility for understanding that we are all different, including ourselves. Assume that filters are present and be quick to not judge or react too quickly to what is being said. Recognize that we all have said things that we wish could have been said better. Communicate to each other that the filters are there and try to look past them to “hear” the real message being communicated.

## ***Effective Communication Styles***

**TALK OPENLY AND SAFELY:** Emotional safety is critical to having a great communication and preserving the oneness.

- People will not be more vulnerable if they feel safe.
- People may respond defensively if they do not feel safe.

Structure is a way to provide safety for one another. Structure could mean that the couple will agree upon certain rules of communication that handle conversations from escalating out of hand.

- **Time Out** is a way for a couple to stop the escalation. Each person will agree to respect the other one’s request for a “time out”, to “cool off” and discuss the disagreement at a later time. This time needs to be a specific time when both can come into the discussion in a more objective, non-emotional way. This will avoid the meltdowns that so often happen during a heated discussion and will allow each other to have productive use of their energy in their relationship.
- **Speaker/Listener Technique:** This is a structured way to talk through tough issues. It allows one person to talk without being interrupted. This allows that person to express their opinions in a safe manner while the other actively listens objectively. Once the person states their opinions, the one who listens then restates what he/she has heard and then wait on a response to see if he/she heard correctly. So many times couples jump to conclusions and often do not hear all that is being said or they may have misunderstood the original intent.

Once the listener has restated what was previously said, then it is his/her time to express his/her opinions or feelings with the other person listening (silent and respectful) until finished. The listener then restates what was heard without any additional comment or objections.

Once both have stated their view, feelings, or opinions and what they have heard, then both take turns in trying to solve the problems. The important thing to remember is to be courteous and allow each other to state their thoughts and opinions, whether or not you agree, and that the discussion is **proceeding without escalation**. You may stop each other to clarify a statement so that you are hearing correctly. Also refrain from nonverbals, such as looks, hand motions, and tone. Again, respecting one's opinions is very important for one's validation and shows you care.

It is also important for you to agree when to use the Speaker/Listener approach. An over dominant attitude or placing your partner in a defensive mode is never a good way to use this approach. One way that many couples have used is to say something like this, "I feel like we are not getting anywhere in our discussion, could we try the speaker/listener technique to see if that can help us communicate each other's thoughts and feelings?"

- **Awareness Wheel:** This technique allows a couple to share their feelings when a certain subject or fear is given and allows that person to share a dialog that is listed on the wheel to help them to communicate better and for the other person to realize their feelings, fears, or problems they are experiencing.
- **XYZ Communication:** This allow a person to state their own feelings to a certain behavior or setting so that it is more of an "I" statement. This allows the other party to better understand that person.

WHEN YOU DID X	(specific behavior)
IN SITUATION Y	(specific setting)
I FELT Z	(specific feeling)

**Example:** "I feel angry when you throw your dirty clothes on the floor after I have told you how that irritates me."

**Example:** "When you make loans without asking for my opinion, I feel angry and unimportant."

**Example:** "When you decided to play ball on our anniversary date, it made me feel you like the guys more than me."

Feeling words could be, glad, sad, happy, anxious, scared, frustrated, warm, low, excited, pleased angry, lonely, nervous, bad, agitated, euphoric, irritated, embarrassed, etc.

Most males only have a vocabulary of 25% of that of a female. No wonder that couples have communication problems when the effective words are left out.

- **Parroting/Paraphrasing:**

This approach is usually used with teenage children or a partner who does not communicate well. My repeating their statement in a form of a question, it usually allows the person to continue expanding his/her feelings or sharing additional information about an event. Keep repeating his/her answer with a short summarization in a question form. This is a short-term approach but can get a dialog going. Do not render an opinion or try to solve anything in this discussion, it is merely an attempt of getting one to expand or communicate more openly.

## ***Hidden Issues***

Couples may have disagreements through a wide variety of issues or events. Many of these are day-to-day happenings in life, others are hidden from view. It is important for everyone to know that each person was raised in a different environment and comes into a relationship with many past experiences of hurts, beliefs, esteem issues, confidence, family, control, etc. A person carries this around with them, like "baggage", and is reopened whenever there is an issue or event that is triggered.

This baggage is not necessarily wrong but we must consider that we are all different and with that, our past and how we handle issues can also be different. If we cannot recognize this, frustration and control issues will occur.

"Baggage" can include some of the following items:

- Jealousy
- Control
- Self-esteem
- Acceptance
- Rejection
- Caring
- Alcohol/drugs in the family
- Sex
- Religion
- Integrity
- Forgiveness
- Abuse

These are a few areas that may be hidden and are not openly discussed every day, especially when there are disagreements. There may be an underlying reason why your spouse is acting or overreacting to a particular situation. Before one can solve any issue/problem, one must look beyond the possible words to discover any underlying issues that have never been dealt with.

Maslow's need of hierarchy reveals that a person cannot fully have a healthy relationship and succeed unless their basic needs are not met first. Many people have come from homes with abuse, neglect, or not feeling safe and secure.

# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maslow's\\_Hierarchy\\_of\\_Needs.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maslow's_Hierarchy_of_Needs.svg)

When tensions escalate in the relationship, their past (baggage) is soon re-opened to reveal some of the "hidden issues" that are painful, perhaps never addressed. How many times have you heard this statement, "You don't love me", after a long discussion of perhaps "where to eat". It was not asking where you wanted to eat that triggered that statement, it was something else that was hidden and triggered to make that individual feel insecure and perhaps unloved.

Every relationship must validate its existence. If one makes light of sincere feelings/emotions from your partner, it will only increase negative outcomes in that relationship (makes things worse). Just because you may not feel or express the same feelings does not mean your partner's feelings are not real and ignoring this does nothing to validate the existence of your relationship. Remember the oneness? Remember the "You" statements, "Cheer up, snap out of it", "Stop being so sensitive!", "That's stupid, why would you ever think that way?" These are painful put-downs that never add value to anyone, much less your relationship.

In order to get past hidden issues, one must validate your partner by:

- Attentive listening, using paralinguage, and other non-verbals to help that individual know you are listening.
- Reflective feelings, trying to understand the feelings and thoughts behind your partner's reactions even if they are different from yours.
- Summarize from other's perspective, allowing the partner to know you are listening and that you understand their concerns or feelings.
- Show tolerance/benefit of doubt, validate they are important, not only who they are, but their feelings and hurts. Be patient because you are healing past hurts that can increase the intimacy and trust of your relationship.

- Take the person seriously, will only enhance the probability that they will take you seriously when you need support. Remember this relationship is the two of you, not just one.
- Provide the nurturance and support that is needed to complete this healing. This is a continuing process. If you really are committed to one another, your relationship should do everything possible to nurture and support one another. Remember the positives!

## **Problem Solving**

Many issues or problems go unresolved due to a lack of good problem solving techniques. Listed below are 6 areas that are critical for any problem/issue to be solved in a Christian relationship:

**Pray Together:** Prayer is essential for every Christian and especially when dealing with issues in a relationship. We must seek God's wisdom rather our own emotions and insecurities. The key is to pray together, not for the other person to agree with your ideas but to humbly ask God to reveal the best alternatives for your relationship.

*Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight."*

**Identify the Problem:** It is extremely frustrating for people to work on issues/problems they cannot identify. One has to name their issue before any solution can be found. Name issues/feelings correctly, which means that you may have to help your spouse to identify these.

**Example:** Men have a vocabulary of about 25% of that of females, especially concerning feelings. Men may say they feel like going to town but in reality they do not feel anything, they just think it is a good idea.

**Create a Platform To Honestly Discuss Solutions:** Ask yourself and to each other, "What can we do differently this week to deal with ...?" Both parties must create a safe platform for each one to talk freely about their feelings and thoughts.

Do not try to solve anything, avoid the "you" and "I" statements. This step requires a "we" type of approach. Also avoid any form of heated or controlled dialog. This step is to prepare you for a brainstorming session to come up with as many ideas to bring a win-win solution to your relationship.

**Write Down as Many Suggestions/Brainstorm:** Once your platform is safe enough to freely share ideas, make a list of every possible way that is different from what you may be doing now to help this situation/issue. Be creative,

imaginative, do not rush any suggestions, don't put down or ignore your partner's ideas or suggestions. The team needs to be clear, making each other feel comfortable in trying to bring a solution, and of course, do not be judgmental. You are just gathering as many ideas and suggestions possible to choose from.

Some or many of these ideas may not work but you are working as a team, working in a positive manner, validating each other's existence. Please do not be too quick to bring a quick-fix to your situation, we want to create as many ideas that can bring a lasting solution.

**Agree on a Plan/Compromise:** Many people look at the word "compromise" as someone winning and someone losing. This is further than the truth in our step. Our goal is to agree with a direction/plan of action to take in order to bring about a different result. (The word insanity is doing the same thing and expecting different results)

This session is to bring about a win-win solution that can enhance your relationship and allow your relationships to be more fulfilling. Division will only cause destruction; unity will always bring strength. Evaluate all your ideas and choose the one(s) you both agree on. Again, do not overpower or negatively influence the other person to "give in" to your way of thinking. Remember, it is "we".

This step will also include the when and how you formulate or implement these ideas/suggestions you both agree on. Come up with a timetable to get these launched, who is to do them (using each other's strengths), and agree to come back at some point in time to evaluate how successful these ideas were.

**Evaluate/Follow-up:** Every couple should decide a point of time to come back to evaluate the success of their ideas. Many times, couples will determine how long they wish to try these ideas, such as "How long will we cut back on spending in order to pay off our bills?"

Don't be surprised if you have to "tweak" or adjust some of your plan to bring a more lasting success. In the example above, a couple may look at going out on a "special date" once a month as a reward to making progress in their teamwork. Remember your plan is specifically designed for your relationship, not someone else's. One can learn from others but don't lean on someone else's advice. Learn to work together with your partner to gain lasting solutions that both of you can agree on.

Another follow-up question can include, "What can we do to make this even better?" Evaluate, improve, modify, and rejoice in working together!

**Problem Discussion--Expressing Criticism Constructively:** Partners in every couple must be able to feel that they can communicate and be heard no matter what the indifference may be. We all can listen constructively to one's frustrations, concerns, fears, and emotions without totally compromising or giving into your partner's wish all of the time. Marriage is a two-way street.



Both partners must be validated in that each other is concerned for the **oneness** of the marriage (what is in the best interest of each other).

*1 Peter 3:9-10 says, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech."*

Everyone wants their marriage to be filled with a **blessing**. Arguments only escalate whenever couples insult one another and do not allow for anyone to disagree constructively. Again, it is perfectly normal to disagree but it is abnormal to become disagreeable. It is contrary to our faith and who we say we are (Christians) and contrary to God's Word (for us to be in oneness).

**Many times events will trigger an escalation. Refrain from being reactive. Live in a proactive state in dealing with issues, problems, and feelings.**

## **Commitment**

Commitment can be thought as the "glue" which holds a relationship together. There are some key dimensions to consider in describing commitment.

**Personal dedication** is a label given to a dimension of commitment. It refers to the desire of an individual to maintain and improve the quality of his or her relationship for the joint benefit of both partners. Personal dedication is demonstrated by a desire not only to continue in the relationship but to improve it, to sacrifice for it, to invest in it, to link personal goals to it, and to seek your partner's welfare, not simply one's own desires.

In contrast, **constrain commitment** is a label that forces the individuals to maintain their relationships regardless to personal dedication to it. These constraints may arise from either external or internal pressures and favor stability, not necessarily for relationship satisfaction or quality. Constraints makes termination of a relationship a hardship, economically impossible, or hurting others, such as children. Many relationships may stay together for the sake of their children. Oddly enough, when children are old enough to be out on their own, the relationship has weathered the storms of differences to remain together. Some find it convenient to terminate at this time.

As contrast to constraint, personal dedication is more fulfilling, rewarding, and satisfying. It provides stability for the future and maintains a sense of belonging than with merely existing. Even though most relationships shows some measure of constraint, it is our belief to nurture one's relationship, personally invest into each other's well being. To be selfish or self-centered means to be insensitive to your partner. To seek things your own way, for your good, is above all, empty, lonely, and sad.

A good marriage is about unity (oneness) and stability. In Jesus' teaching we see elements of constraint and dedication, as constraint has to do with stability

of the bond and dedication has to do with the depth of the bond of oneness (matter of the heart and love).

***Love...always hopes. Always perseveres. Love never fails...***

## **Sex**

One of every three couples struggle with problems associated with low sexual desire.

One study shows 20% of couples have sex fewer than 10 times a year.

Even when we struggle with other problems in marriage, we can make love to soothe the bad feelings.

To males, to be disinterested in sex is to feel less than a man. Most males think about sex about every 23 seconds.

Many couples don't talk and have close communication of how their day was but then expects sex? Why should I have sex with someone who is not interested in me anymore?

So many feel sex starved. It is not about the numbers so much as it is the connection, intimacy, closeness, and affection. It's about feeling attractive, feeling masculine or feminine, and feeling as a whole person. We need to be empathetic to our partner's feelings.

Fluctuating hormones, medications (diabetic, high blood pressure, birth control pills, and more) and illness---can greatly affect how one feels about being physical with their spouse as well as performing.

A person can have high or low sex drive but may have little or nothing to do with his/her level of love for his/her spouse.

Some studies suggest that as high as 50% of women and 20% of men say their sex drive is not what it used to be.

Many men are uncomfortable in discussing lack of performance. It is important to talk and listen to each other.

Some people have complained about having sex 4-5 times a week and it has lowered to 2-3 times per week, which is still above the national average. Some will say, if it is up to me, we would have sex in every 4-5 months.

The first thing you need to know, it is not what your friends or neighbors are doing, it is all about you and your spouse!

Even if you are concerned about low desire, you may need to take in your spouse's feelings into account. It's about relationships.

If your lack of sexual interest with your spouse has prevented you from nurturing that part of your marriage, you need to do whatever it takes to refuel that part of your marriage.

Many times, your spouse may have a deeper question other than sex. "You don't care for our relationship", "I'm not important to you", etc.

## ***Touching***

Being touched in stimulating ways often leads to sexual arousal. Arousal triggers a strong desire to continue being sexual. Whenever your spouse touches, kisses, and holds you, it feels good and increases the desire to continue. If you are different, there are other ways to take a step further to longer kissing and touching.

### ***Reasons for lack of sexual desire or drive include:***

Childbirth	Poor self-esteem
Menopause	Body Image
Male Menopause	Grief over loss
Medications & Illness	Motherhood
Depression	Mid-life crisis
Sexual or Emotional abuse as a child	Fatigue/Stress

### ***Myths:***

Good girls don't have sex.  
Guys who desire sex are macho, but girls who want sex are bad.  
Sex is for procreation, not enjoyment.  
Women should never appear too interested.  
When women say not, they really mean yes.  
The bigger the man's instrument, the better a sex partner they are.  
Intercourse is what sex is all about.

## ***Suggested Books on Sex***

*The Sex Starved Marriage.* Michele Weiner Davis.

*The Act of Marriage.* Tim & Beverly LaHaye.

*Sex is for Christians.* Lewis Smedes.

*The 5 Love Languages.* Gary Chapman.

*God is in the Bedroom Too—The Pleasures of True Intimacy.* P.M. Wilson.

*Holy Sex: God's Purpose and Plan for our Sexuality.* Terry Wier.

*Intended for Pleasure.* Ed Wheat, M.D. & Gayle Wheat.

*A Gift of Sex: A guide of Sexual Fulfillment.* (don't have author)

*A Celebration of Sex for Newlyweds.* Douglas Rosenau.

*Sex Begins in the Kitchen: Because Love is an All-Day Affair.* Dr. Kevin Leman.

*Sexual Character Beyond Technique to Intimacy.* Marva Dawn.

*Sex over 40.* Samuel H. Rosenthal, M.D.

*203 Ways to Drive a Man Wild in Bed.* Olivia St. Clair

*52 Ways to Have Funtastic Sex.* Dr. Clifford & Joyce Penner.

*The Power of Intimate Love.* (don't have author).

*Romancing Your Husband.* Smith.

*Too Close Too Soon.* Jim Talley & Bobbie Reed.

Mars and Venus in the Bedroom. John Gray, PhD.

# ***Suggested Goals for a Successful Marriage***

1. Set What You Want In Your Life and Marriage! Set your goals firm. Do not back off or let anyone interfere with your relationship!!! Whether it is your friends or relatives, do not allow anyone to interfere or compromise your goals, beliefs, or values. If you understand drinking and a good relationship usually do not mix, either stop hanging around those who drink or make sure they do not compromise your conviction. If you want to be active in church, be sure not to stay out late the night before. If you want to complement each other, do not hang around those who do not appreciate their mate.

2. Speak Only Positive and Good Things About Each Other! Words are very powerful and have meaning. Studies of couple who continued to speak positive and uplifting words to one another had meaningful marriages. If you want the other person to love and take care of you for a lifetime, invest in speaking good things about one another. Compare your relationship to a bank account. The more positive deposits you make, the more valuable your account.

3. Understand That No Relationship Is Perfect! The successful marriages limit any disagreements and escalation!!! It is proven that when we argue, our IQ usually goes down. The more we argue, the lower intelligence we display.

4. Don't Hold Grudges! There will be disagreements. Forgive easily and to work on issues. One of the marvelous things about relationships is that we are all different. A difference of opinion does not mean a couple is not compatible. It just means that we all have different opinions. We all have different ways to accomplish the same thing or there are times when the other person has a better idea.

5. Pray For One Another Every Day! There are some things that come from prayer and fasting. Pray a covering of protection over each other before leaving your home. Your prayers should include asking the Lord to set guardian angels to war and protect your home and your relationship. Your home is a sacred place, a refuge, one of protection, and one that validates your existence. You have to fight for your relationship! Once you leave your home, there are outside forces that are vying to gain your attention and affection. Your attention should always be focused on your mate and his/her health and well-being.

6. Pay Off Your Bills! Money is one of the most argued things within a marriage. It is very difficult to have one person's obligations paid off while the other one is indebted and creating more debt. A marriage is about fairness, one that distributes equally and as a team, not buying toys while the other one is paying off bills.

7. Buy Things For One Another! One of the biggest complaints of marriage is when a person stops doing nice things as they did when they were dating. Just because we are now married does not mean for us to stop sending cards, small gifts, flowers, going out on a date, and taking a special time to tell each other

you love each other. Things don't have to be expensive, but it is the thought that counts. Remember to invest in your relationship!

8. When You Are Married, Act Married! Some people may have friends outside of their marriage, either from school, work, or church. It is important that both of you provide balance in your time and marriage. There is nothing wrong in playing sports, but if you are gone all the time from your spouse, someone else may be giving your spouse attention. Do not allow the "little foxes" spoil the vine. Being gone from your spouse may send a message that you prefer to spend more time with others than with them.

9. Attend Church Together! Marriage is difficult enough without maintaining a commitment to serve God. There are too many distractions and influences that will hinder a relationship without God. Remember your wedding vows, "What God has joined together". Being close to God allows a couple to seek wisdom and guidance in their relationship. It also provides a willingness to allow forgiveness to play an important part of your marriage.

10. Touch A lot, Spend Special Time Alone! There is something special about touching! One thing is that it shows the importance of each other. But touching never solves disagreements but it validates you care for the other person. If there is a disagreement, one may try to comfort, make light of that disagreement, or use sex as a way to get the other person's mind off the disagreement. This is wrong and is manipulative!!! Touch and sex is reserved for special times, not for ways to gain an advantage over the other partner.

11. Talk To Each Other About Major Purchases! You may have one person in your relationship that is very impulsive. Impulsiveness should never be a part of any major purchase or decision!!! This can place a financial and emotional burden on your relationship. Creating such a burden is not an act of love.

12. Don't Let Arguments or Disagreements Get Out Of Hand! Disagreements in every relationship will happen, even in the best of marriages. Either of you can call a "time out" to set a time to discuss disagreements or you may agree to disagree for that moment.

There are some things over which you may disagree, such as disliking certain foods, having different tastes on clothing or furniture, or being use to certain ways to do things around the house. Remember that both of you were raised by two different families. How you are raised may have an influence on your preferences and the things you are use to as a family.

But you are now a new family. In these situations, it is probably best to agree on mutual things. Something that both of you can agree. Remember when disagreements arise, it is always best to try to limit your anger and communicate to each other in positive ways. Never name call or place negative put-downs to one another. Do not use humor to make the other person look stupid. Successful marriages have learned the importance of loving one another without using negative influences or trying to get one's way. These will only destroy a relationship. Once you fully understand this as a couple, you are on your way to having a more successful and productive relationship.