

WEEK ONE

BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS



WHAT IS MARRIAGE?

- Marriage involves a man and woman being joined together and becoming one.
- A relationship of increasing intimacy and interdependence.

'For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.'

Genesis 2:24

THE FOUR SEASONS OF MARRIAGE



1. SPRING

Early years: Season of discovery and excitement; initial infatuation will wear off at some stage.

- The greatest need is to accept each other.



2. SUMMER

Season of increased activity and demands; may become parents during this season; may face pressures of infertility; careers can be more demanding.

- The greatest need is to give time to the marriage relationship.



3. AUTUMN

Season of richness and maturity; reaping the benefits of what has gone before; marriage more established having weathered tough times; may have teenagers in the house; emotionally the most exhausting stage of parenting.

- The greatest need is to support and encourage each other.



4. WINTER

An empty-nest stage for many; probably fewer demands with an opportunity for more time together; can be the most exciting stage of marriage.

- The greatest needs are shared interests and good communication.

WHY DO SOME MARRIAGES BREAKDOWN?

- A process of growing apart
- A lack of communication
- Consumerism - the failure to work at the relationship



ANY COUPLE CAN HAVE A GOOD MARRIAGE

With

- The right tools in your toolbox
- Willingness to work things out
- Divine help

EXERCISE 1: REFLECTING

1. Speak about the season you are in.
2. Discuss the pressures you have previously worked through.
3. Discuss the pressures you are currently facing.





BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A STRONG MARRIAGE



1. Make time for each other

If a relationship is to thrive and keep growing, we must have regular time together. At the very least, plan to spend 1–2 hours alone together each week, to rekindle romance, to have fun, to talk together about your feelings (e.g. your hopes, fears, worries, excitements). We call this *marriage time*. Marriage time should have all the connotations of a 'date' together.

The benefits of marriage time

- Keeps the fun and romance alive in our relationship
- Deepens our understanding and appreciation of each other
- Ensures we communicate regularly on a meaningful level

How to make marriage time happen

- Plan time together. It doesn't happen automatically. Find the best time for both of you and book it in your calendar just like you would any other social or business appointment. Write it in your diaries as marriage time e.g. Monday evening, 'marriage time' or Wednesday lunchtime, 'marriage time'. If you are very busy, plan marriage time several months in advance.
- Prioritise your time together. Make marriage time a commitment that you stick to every week. It should take priority over other demands such as work, going out with friends, playing sport and even parenting.
- Protect your time together. Protect this time from interruptions and distractions such as the telephone, the computer, visitors, the television and over-long working hours.



2. Nurture each other

- Nurturing involves seeking to meet each other's emotional needs for affection, encouragement, support, comfort, etc.
- We all have a longing to be loved and to be known by another
- Empty space inside that needs to be filled up with love
- When empty, we feel alone or lonely
- Giving each other emotional support refills the empty space inside
- We are made for close relationships

How to nurture

- Be proactive rather than reactive
- Being reactive means focusing on each other's shortcomings
- Being proactive means focusing on each other's needs
- Proactive behaviour draws couples together because each one feels loved.
When we feel loved, we feel like loving.

Study each other

- Recognise each other's needs
- Often our partner's needs and desires will be different to our own
- Discover what matters to your husband or wife - otherwise we tend to give what we like to receive
- Needs change over time
- Make requests, not demands
- We can't assume our husband or wife automatically knows our desires - we must trust each other



EXERCISE 2: KNOWING ME, KNOWING YOU

Please read through the list on the next page.

1. In column A, tick the three that matter most to you (i.e. what you would most like your husband or wife to give you)
2. In column B, tick the three that you believe matter most to your husband or wife (i.e. what you think they would most like to receive from you)

NB: There is some overlap between the different desires – put those three, which most clearly express your preferences.

3. When you have both finished, exchange your responses and see how well you understand your husband and wife:
 - How close were you to selecting the three that matter most to your husband or wife?
 - How many of the same desires did you and your partner put for yourselves? 0,1,2, or 3?
 - Consider which, if any, of the list of desires you tend to give least to your husband or wife. Are these any of the three that matter most to your partner?

A

Myself
(choose 3)

B

My Partner
(choose 3)

Affirmation – being appreciated for who you are by your partner

Approval – being commended for those things you have done well

Companionship – doing things together and sharing experiences

Encouragement – being inspired to keep going through your partner's words

Openness – being confident of your partner's honesty about every aspect of their lives, including their feelings and ideas

Physical Affection – the communication of care and closeness through physical touch

Practical Help – experiencing your partner's help in big or small tasks

Presents – receiving tangible expressions of love and thoughtfulness

Respect – having your ideas and opinions considered and valued by your partner

Security – facing the future confident of your partner's commitment to love you and stay with you

Sexual Intimacy – having regular opportunities to express and receive love through your sexual relationship

Support – knowing your partner is working with you to fulfil your goals

Time Together – knowing your partner has set aside time to be with you on a regular basis

Understanding – knowing your partner is aware of what matters to you

Undivided Attention – focusing on each other to the exclusion of any distractions

Set aside two hours of marriage time together sometime before the next session for the following two exercises.

EXERCISE 1: PLANNING TO SUCCEED

Each of you writes down your answers to the following questions.

When you have both finished, show each other what you have written and then discuss your answers.

A. Time Together

1. How much time do you set aside to spend alone together to build your marriage?

on a daily basis? _____

on a weekly basis? _____

on an annual basis? _____

2. How much time could you be spending together regularly, and when, on a:

Daily basis?

e.g., 20 minutes to talk together when we get home in the evening or 10 minutes in the morning to plan the day

On a weekly basis?

e.g., every Friday night to go out together or Monday evening to spend time at home talking over a meal

On an annual basis?

e.g., go away for a long weekend as a couple or have a yearly mini-honeymoon

B. Shared interests

1. What interests do you have in common?

(Think back to what you did when you first went out together.)

e.g. visiting art galleries, playing a sport, exploring new places, going to the movies or theatre

2. Which of these interests do you pursue together as a couple now?

How regularly?

How much time do you set aside for them?

e.g.: playing tennis – once every two weeks – two hours

3. Are there other mutual interests you would benefit from pursuing together now?

C. Separate interests

1. What interests do you encourage your partner to pursue that you do not share?

2. What interests do you pursue that your partner does not share?

3. Are there other separate interests that you or your partner would like to pursue?

You: _____

Your Partner: _____

D. Annual Vacations

1. Which have been your best vacations together and why?

2. Suggest an idea for a vacation / time away together in the future.

EXERCISE 2: SHOWING LOVE

1. Write down what you remember to be your husband's or wife's top three desires from the exercise "Knowing Me, Knowing You" on page 6

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

2. Now write down your own three main desires and give examples of how your husband or wife could meet them for you

For example:

My desires	How my partner could meet them
Conversation	Initiate conversation when we are having a meal together by asking me questions about my day
Approval	Tell me when I have done something well at home or at work. Show that you notice when I have made an effort
Time together	Take the initiative in suggesting we go out together. Sit down with me for 30 minutes each evening to talk about the day.
Physical affection	Hug and kiss me when we see each other after time apart. Hold me in bed before we go to sleep.
Presents	Give me a gift when I least expect it.

My desires	How my partner could meet them
1. _____	_____

2. _____	_____

3. _____	_____

- Show each other what you have written
- In the coming weeks, try to concentrate on meeting your husband's or wife's desires rather than criticising him or her for not meeting yours

WEEK TWO

THE ART OF COMMUNICATION



INTRODUCTION

- Intimacy requires effective communication
- We all have a longing to be known
- The Marriage Course is designed to help couples communicate both during and between the sessions

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Communication involves the message, the speaker and the listener
- Building intimacy in marriage involves hearing each other's experiences, thoughts, feelings and desires

TELL YOUR SPOUSE THAT YOU FEEL LOVED WHEN YOU FEEL VALIDATED.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF TALKING

- Telling each other our thoughts and feelings
- May have been taught to hide feelings in upbringing
- Will take courage and practice to re-learn how to talk about feelings
- Some have difficulty recognising what they are feeling

COMPLETE EXERCISE 1: BARRIERS TO TALKING ON PAGE 15

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

- We can become highly selective in our listening
- Most of us take listening for granted, yet it is possible to close our ears
- Listening has the power to make our husband or wife feel loved and valued
- One of the most important skills to learn for a healthy marriage
- The Bible places great value on listening effectively

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. James 1:19

Those who answer before listening – that is their folly and their shame. Proverbs 18:13



3. HINDRANCES TO LISTENING

A. FILTERS

- We all listen through filters but often we are unaware of them
- When someone is speaking our own memories, attitudes, prejudices, physical environment, lack of interest, etc all affect what we hear.
- Sometimes we are listening more to ourselves than the other person
- Effective communication requires us to control the conversation in our mind

B. BAD HABITS

1. Reassuring
 2. Giving advice
 3. Intellectualising
 4. Going off on a tangent (deflector)
 5. Interrupting
- These habits prevent the speaker from saying what they're feeling and they may eventually shut down
 - We need to listen first before coming in with our contribution

EXERCISE 2: IDENTIFYING BAD HABITS

Take a few moments to identify your particular bad habit and discuss this with your husband or wife

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING

- Pay attention and do not interrupt
- Try to put yourself in your partner's shoes
- Acknowledge their feelings
- Find out what is most important
- Help them work out what they might do

EXERCISE 3: THE POWER OF LISTENING

Discuss the following questions as a couple:

- How do you feel when you are listened to?
- How do you feel when you are not listened to?
- To whom would you go if you needed a listening ear?
- What makes that person a good listener

EXERCISE 1: BARRIERS TO TALKING

Take a few minutes to look at the diagram below together. Tell each other if any of the barriers apply to you.



EXERCISE 4: EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Each of you pick an issue currently upsetting or bothering you that you have not discussed recently. At this point, choose an issue where there has not already been disagreement and conflict. It could be an area of concern related to work, holidays, children, your home, etc.

- The speaker should hold a candle (or something similar) - this is to remind you whose issue is being discussed.
- The speaker tells the listener about the issue and how they feel about it (do not go on for too long). The listener listens and then reflects back.
- Then the listener asks, **'What is the most important aspect of what you are saying?'** The speaker responds. The listener listens and then reflects back again.
- The listener then asks, **'Is there anything you would like me/us to do about what you have just said?'** Again, the listener listens and then reflects back.
- Finally, the listener asks, **'Is there anything more that you would like to say?'** The listener listens and then reflects back again.

Then switch roles so you both have a chance to speak and to listen. This exercise is good practice for all of us, both in talking about our emotions and in listening to each other.

Each of you should complete the exercise below. "How Good is Your Communication?" Compare what you have written.

Next, pick an area of your marriage that you haven't discussed in any depth, and, with your partner follow the steps for Exercise 1. "Effective Listening" (Page 13). Please ensure that both of you are ready to do this and are willing to follow the steps.

Follow the guidelines as listener and speaker as you work through each other's issue. Some of you may experience a strong emotional reaction to what your partner is saying. Try to put your own reaction to one side and keep listening and reflecting back what your partner is feeling.

EXERCISE 1: HOW GOOD IS YOUR COMMUNICATION?

1. Areas in our relationship where I feel that we communicate effectively – i.e., we are both able to express our views, and we understand each other well.

2. Areas where we do communicate, but not well enough – i.e., I feel that there is room for improvement.

3. Areas where we are not communicating at all – whether due to neglect, embarrassment, or fear.

Suggested topics for consideration:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Handling children | • Relatives and in-laws |
| • Money matters | • Death and bereavement |
| • Goals and direction in life | • Job or career/time at work |
| • Sex – frequency or quality | • Church involvement |
| • Family planning/how many children | • Expressing affection and emotions |
| • Jobs around the home | • Relaxation and rest |

EXERCISE 2: IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS

To help those who struggle to identify what they are feeling.

Completing the partial sentences on the following pages will help you identify your emotions and become more emotionally aware.

1. Quickly add a few words to describe your feelings (either positive or negative) for each one. The list below will help you to get started.

Positive Emotions

accepted	encouraged	loved	supported
appreciated	excited	liberated	sure
calm	forgiven	peaceful	trusting
capable	free	positive	understood
carefree	grateful	relaxed	valuable
comforted	happy	relieved	worthwhile
confident	hopeful	respected	
content	humbled	safe	
delighted	joyful	secure	

Negative Emotions

abandoned	depressed	insecure	sad
afraid	disappointed	insignificant	scared
angry	disgusted	jealous	sorrowful
anxious	disrespected	lonely	unappreciated
annoyed	dissatisfied	misunderstood	unloved
apologetic	embarrassed	nervous	upset
ashamed	exposed	numb	used
bored	frustrated	overwhelmed	useless
confused	guilty	pressured	vulnerable
cross	humiliated	rejected	weak
defeated	hurt	resentful	

EXERCISE 2 (CONTINUED)

When we go on vacation, I feel ...

When we go out with friends, I feel ...

When I'm in a room with people I don't know, I feel ...

When I'm with my parents, I feel ...

When I think of past successes, I feel ...

When I think of mistakes I've made, I feel ...

When I think of the future, I feel ...

When I think of relating to God, I feel ...

When my husband/wife tells me he/she loves me, I feel ...

When my husband/wife and I have a disagreement, I feel ...

When my husband/wife tells me something I've done that's disappointed or hurt him/her, I feel ...

When my husband/wife apologises to me, I feel ...

2. Complete the following sentences

I feel most loved when ... _____

I get angry when ... _____

I feel happiest when ... _____

I am sad when ... _____

Now show your husband or wife what you have put.

**3. Tell your husband or wife
about a time you felt**

- Encouraged
- Discouraged
- Understood
- Misunderstood
- Accepted
- Rejected

WEEK THREE

RESOLVING CONFLICT



WHY IS CONFLICT INEVITABLE?

- We are different (different backgrounds, priorities, desires, personalities and opinions)
- No good trying to force our partner to do things our way
- Must see ourselves as being on the same side (3-legged race)
- We are naturally self-centred

PRINCIPLES FOR HANDLING CONFLICT



1. EXPRESS APPRECIATION OF EACH OTHER

- Make your husband or wife feel like the most important person in the world to you
- Focus on what you like and admire about your partner
- Express gratitude for what your partner does
- Show appreciation daily for who your partner is

EXERCISE 1: SHOWING APPRECIATION

Write down six things you appreciate about your husband or wife. (Be specific: thank them for what they do, or express your appreciation for who they are - look particularly for things you may have come to take for granted.)

For example:

I love the way you get on so well with other people.

I love the way you're so affectionate towards me.

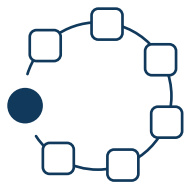
Thank you for working so hard to provide for our family.

Thank you for making our home such a welcoming place to be.

I really appreciate that you fill up the car with petrol.

When you have both finished, show each other what you have written.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____



2. IDENTIFY AND ACCEPT DIFFERENCES

- Recognise differences in temperament, personality, upbringing and values
- Don't try to change each other
- See your marriage as a partnership in which you combine your strengths and support each other's weaknesses
- Maintain a sense of humour

Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you. Romans 15:7

EXERCISE 2: RECOGNISING YOUR DIFFERENCES

1. Mark against each issue where on the line your partner's and your own preferences each lie. (e.g. N = Nick; S = Sue).

Money	Spend _____ S _____ N _____ Save
Punctuality	Have time in hand _____ S _____ N _____ Cut it fine
Issue	
Clothes	Casual _____ Formal
Disagreements	Thrash it out _____ Keep the peace
Holidays	Seek adventure _____ Seek rest
Money	Spend _____ Save
People	Time with others _____ Time alone
Planning	Make plans and stick to them _____ Be spontaneous and go with the flow
Punctuality	Have time in hand _____ Cut it fine
Relaxation	Go out _____ Be at home
Sleeping	Go to bed late _____ Get up early
Sports	Enthusiast _____ Uninterested
Telephone	Talk at length _____ Make arrangements only
Tidiness	Keep everything tidy and under control _____ Be relaxed and live in a mess
TV	Keep it on _____ Throw it out

Other Differences:



2. Show each other what you have put. Then find one issue where your differences can be a source of strength for your relationship.

3. LEARN TO NEGOTIATE



Seven practical steps to peace

1. Find the best time (The 10 o'clock rule)
2. Identify the issue
3. Discuss the issue rather than attack each other
4. Work out possible solutions for now (make a list)
5. Decide on the best solution for now and see if it works
6. Be prepared to re-evaluate if there still seems to be a conflict over the issue
7. Say "I'm sorry"

COMPLETE EXERCISE 3 (PAGE 25) AS A COUPLE

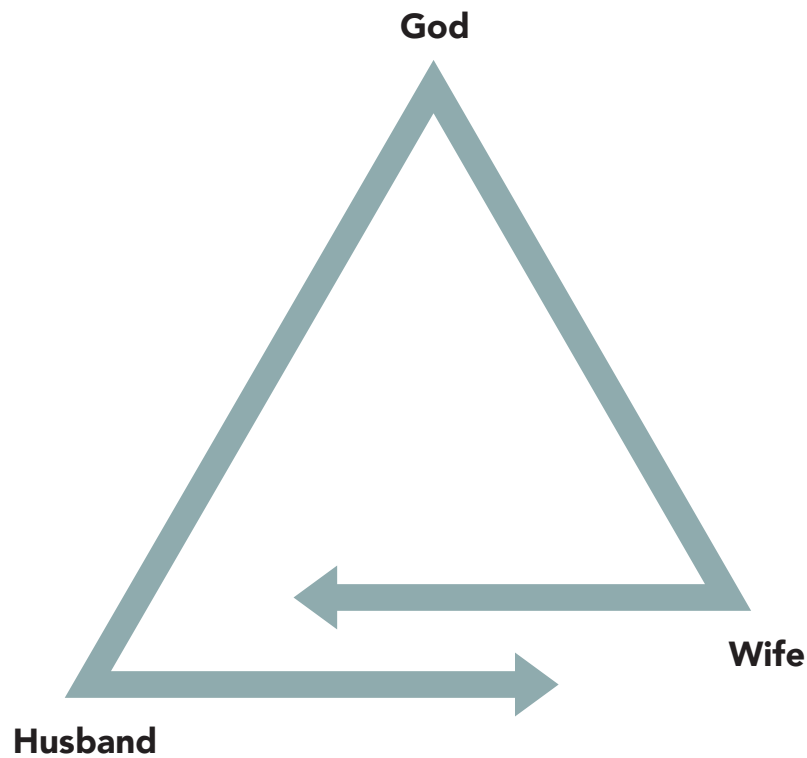


4. GROW TOGETHER

- We're not incompatible unless we refuse to change
- We can change ourselves; we cannot change each other
- We can only change when we know what matters to each other
- We must tell each other what frustrates and hurts us
- Much conflict arises from different assumptions about the way things should be
- Requesting change is helpful; demanding change is harmful

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

When we look to God to meet our needs for significance, security and self-esteem, we are better able to give to each other



A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:12



5. PRAYING TOGETHER

- Helps us connect in a meaningful way
- Ensure prayers are vertical, not horizontal and manipulative
- Five to ten minutes a day is better than an hour every month



EXERCISE 3

1. What strengths do you bring to conflict resolution?

2. What is your growth area?

Complete Exercise 3 if you haven't already done so.

EXERCISE 1: FOCUSING ON THE ISSUE

The purpose of this exercise is to discuss any other areas of conflict and to discover the best solution together. Make sure you are requesting rather than demanding changes in each other.

1. Each of you write down one issue that causes conflict in your marriage which arises from a habit or pattern of behaviour **in you** that needs to be changed.

2. What needs to happen for you to change this pattern of behaviour?

3. What could your partner do to help you to change?

4. Now, using the **Seven practical steps to peace** on Page 20 as a guideline, negotiate the areas of conflict that you each identified.

1. Our agreed mutually acceptable solution is:

2. Write down one issue that causes conflict in your marriage which arises from a habit or pattern of behaviour **in your partner** that could be changed. Be specific and positive as you raise areas of importance to you.

For example:

I would love it if you could be more affectionate when we meet after work.

I wish we could stop criticising each other in front of others / the children.

I would really appreciate it if we could be more punctual.

3. What could your partner do to change this pattern of behaviour?

4. What could you do to help your partner to change?

(**NB:** personal criticism, shouting, nagging, bullying, etc are unhelpful)

Again, using the **Seven practical steps to peace**, negotiate the areas of conflict you each identified for point 5 above.

5. Our mutually agreed acceptable solution is:

6. Would you like to spend a few minutes praying together each day? If so, when and how could this best be achieved?

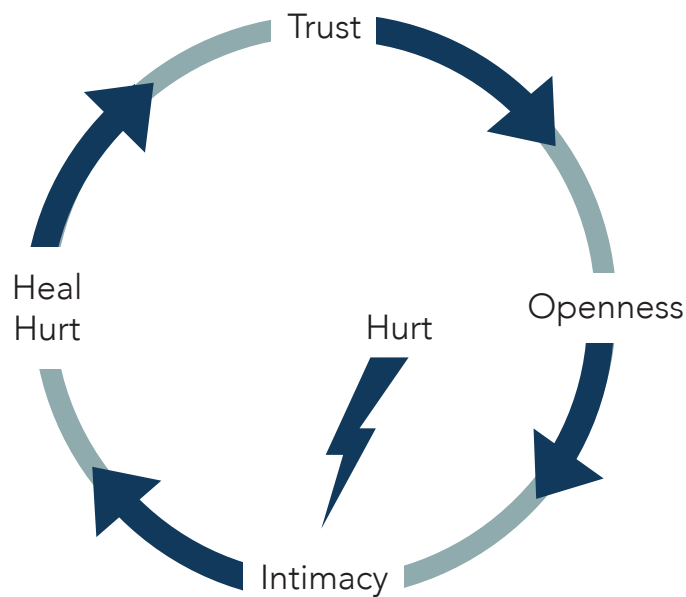
WEEK FOUR

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS



WHY IS FORGIVENESS IMPORTANT?

- To say sorry and forgive is so important because we will all hurt our partner
- Dealing with hurt is vital to intimacy
- Relationships grow through trust and intimacy
- Hurt undermines trust and openness



REACTION TO HURT

1. ANGER

- Some are like rhinos – they attack when provoked
- Some are like hedgehogs - they withdraw when threatened

2. RETALIATION

- To let our partner feel what the hurt felt like

3. FEAR

- We withdraw so as not to feel hurt again

4. GUILT

- Both partners will always cause hurt

In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Ephesians 4:26-27

COMPLETE EXERCISE 1 (PAGE 28) AS A GROUP

COMPLETE EXERCISE 2 (PAGE 29) AS A COUPLE

WHAT HAPPENS IF HURT OR ANGER IS BURIED?



PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Disturbed sleep, appetite affected, medical conditions e.g. ulcers, high blood pressure, pain



BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS

- Inability to relax, low sexual desire, quick temper/intolerance, escape through drugs, alcohol, pornography etc., escape into work/children/religious activity etc.



EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

- Loss of positive emotions, low self-esteem/depression, shut down, fear of confrontation

PROCESS OF HEALING THE HURT

1. IDENTIFY THE HURT

- Take the initiative to resolve anger and hurt
- Recognise how you have caused pain in your partner
- Be prepared to tell your partner when you have been hurt

2. APOLOGISE

- Take responsibility
- Resist the urge to make excuses or blame your partner
- Confess to God and receive forgiveness
- Apologise to each other

3. FORGIVE (Ephesians 4:31-32)

4. START WITH A FRESH PAGE (1 Corinthians 13:5)

5. MAKE A DECISION NOT TO HURT AGAIN

"If your brother or sister sins against you, go and show them their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over." Matthew 18:15

COMPLETE EXERCISE 3 (PAGE 31)

EXERCISE 1: RHINOS & HEDGEHOGS

Identify whether you are a rhino or a hedgehog. If you're not sure, ask your partner.

EXERCISE 2: HANDLING ANGER

The purpose of this exercise is to help you recognise how each of you typically responds when you feel hurt and how you display anger.

- Put a number between 0 and 4 in the box against each statement to indicate how true that statement is **for you**. Then add up columns A and B.

0 = never 1 = rarely 2 = sometimes 3 = often 4 = always

When I am hurt, I ...	A	B
1. Keep the peace at any price.....	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
2. Overreact and go on the attack	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
3. Fail to admit I am angry or hurt	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
4. Apologise because I must have caused it	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
5. Become controlling and bossy	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
6. Give my husband/wife the silent treatment	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
7. Am quick to blame others	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
8. Retaliate by becoming confrontational	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
9. Withdraw and shut down emotionally	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
10. Want to run away and hide	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
11. Lose control/become explosive by shouting/slamming doors, etc.....	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
12. Say things I regret later.....	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
13. Try to ignore my feelings	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
14. Become cold and clinical or sarcastic	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
15. Say things to hurt my partner	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
16. Withhold physical affection/sex	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
17. Demand immediate discussion of issue	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
18. Hurl accusations to take the focus off my responsibility	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
19. Feel I don't have a right to be angry	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
20. Bring up past hurt not related to the issue	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
TOTALS	A <input type="text"/>	B <input type="text"/>

A = Rhino Behaviour
B = Hedgehog Behaviour

MY SCORE

MY PARTNER'S SCORE

Now look at each other's scores and discuss them, especially your differences.



2. At times of disagreement, what words or phrases are you aware that you use, if any, that hurt your partner?

What words or phrases does your partner use, if any, that hurt you?
(This question is especially important if either or both of you recognise that you react like the rhino.)

3. At times of disagreement, are you and your partner able to express your views and feelings?

If not, how could you help your partner to do so?
(This question is especially important if either or both of you recognise that you react like the hedgehog.)

EXERCISE 3: IDENTIFYING UNRESOLVED HURT

This exercise concentrates particularly on identifying the areas of hurt and seeking to understand each other's feelings better. The homework focuses on apology and forgiveness.

Try to identify your partner's hurt

Think about ways in which you have hurt your partner and affected the marriage that have not been resolved between you. Think back to when you were going out, when you were engaged and early times of your marriage, as well as recent times.

- What have I failed to do that I should be doing?
- What have I done (or am doing) that I should not do?
- Where have I failed to meet my husband's/wife's needs?
- What have I said that has been hurtful?
- What have I left unsaid that could have shown love and encouragement?

Don't make excuses or blame your partner. The following examples show the difference:



Making excuses / blaming your partner:

I know I criticised you in front of the children yesterday, but I wouldn't have done so if you hadn't made us twenty minutes late.



Proper apology:

I hurt you by criticising you in front of the children yesterday, it was unkind of me. I am sorry.



Making excuses or blaming your partner:

I know I was grumpy and rude towards you last night, but you don't understand what intense pressure I've been under at work over the past two weeks.



Making excuses or blaming your partner:

I was selfish and insensitive of me to be rude and grumpy towards you last night. I am sorry to have hurt you.

Write a list of things that come to mind. Be specific.

(Example: I have stopped being affectionate and rejected your initiatives to make love; I have fallen asleep in front of the television instead of talking to you; I have been out more consistently with work colleagues or friends than we have together as a couple).

Identify your own hurt

Identify how your partner has hurt you. The cause of the pain could be recent or a long time ago. Your partner might or might not have been aware of hurting you, and it could have been one incident or repeated many times. Make sure you are specific and that you describe how you felt. Use 'I' sentences.

(Example: I felt unsupported and unappreciated when you didn't notice the hard work I put into decorating the house for Christmas. I was hurt when you didn't say anything special about my promotion. I haven't got over the fact that you lied to me on the night we first went out together. I felt rejected when you went out to the pub the night we got back from honeymoon. I feel frustrated because you don't discuss financial decisions with me.)

1. When you have both finished, exchange your lists.
2. Read silently the ways you have hurt each other.
3. One of you 'reflect back' to your partner the reason for their hurt and the feelings it produced in them, without trying to interpret what they have written or to defend yourself. To clarify what they feel, ask questions such as: "What did you mean by that?" or 'Is there anything else you would like to say?'
4. Then the other partner should 'reflect back' in the same way. Make sure each of you has an understanding of the feelings that are described.
5. Return the lists to each other. Then add to or revise your list of the ways you have hurt your partner. Spend some time considering every aspect of their hurt. Try to see it through your partner's eyes.
6. Throughout the coming week, allow God the opportunity to show you new insights into why your partner feels hurt and your part in causing it.

It is important to do the homework in order to complete the process of 'getting rid of bitterness, rage & anger' (*Ephesians 4:31*) by apologising and forgiving.

[illegible]

Set aside two hours of marriage time together sometime before the next session for the following two exercises.

EXERCISE 1: HEALING UNRESOLVED HURT

Do steps 1 – 4 on your own and then do steps 5-8 together.

1. Identify your partner's deepest hurt

Refer back to your list of your partner's hurts and write down the primary way in which you have hurt your husband/wife.

(Example: I hurt my husband/wife through making a joke about the misunderstanding between us; my husband/wife was hurt when I paid more attention to my work than to him/her.)

One of the primary ways I have hurt my husband/wife is:

2. Try to understand your partner's feelings

With regard to this hurt, my husband/wife feels:

(Example: ridiculed, humiliated, unaffirmed, criticised, rejected, unloved, undervalued.)

3. Recognise your responsibility (refuse to make excuses or to blame your husband or wife)

- I did it
- It was wrong
- I need to be forgiven by God and by my husband/wife
- I need to be prepared to change

From now on, with God's help, I intent to:

Now repeat steps 1 – 3 with any other ways you have hurt your husband / wife.

“... now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.” 2 Corinthians 7: 9

4. Confess your sins to God

Be specific – “Lord God, I have hurt You and my husband/wife by:

This was wrong and I ask You to forgive me. Thank you for taking my guilt on the cross and for giving me a new start. I ask You to help me to be the husband/wife You want me to be”.

Believe God's promise of forgiveness and cleansing.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

5. Say sorry to each other

"I am so sorry for _____

"I know it hurts you and makes you feel: _____

"From now on I intent to: _____

"Please forgive me."

6. Forgive each other

- Say to your husband/wife. "I forgive you".
- For some people, this is a struggle; it can be helpful first to express to God In writing our desire to forgive our husband/wife for particular hurts:

e.g., Dear Lord, thank You that You know all about me and love me. Thank you for being ready to forgive me for the ways I have hurt others. You know how hurt and angry I felt when my husband/wife criticised me when I'd done my best. I choose to let go of my anger and resentment. I want to put my desire to retaliate into Your hands and ask You to help my husband/wife to change. I choose to forgive him/her as You have forgiven me. Please heal the hurt with your love.

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Luke 11: 4

7. Comfort and pray for each other

- This is very valuable when you have made yourselves vulnerable to each other.
- This brings healing to the hurt
- Pray that your husband/wife will know freedom from guilt

8. Do something you both enjoy together

- In this way you will start to replace the negative emotions with positive ones

WEEK FIVE

THE IMPACT OF FAMILY PAST & PRESENT



IMPACT OF FAMILY – PAST AND PRESENT

- Family background has a big influence on a marriage
- The expectations of different generations can cause tension within the wider family
- We either repeat or react against the way our parents behaved, particularly when we are relaxed or stressed
 - The positive: be grateful for what was good in your own and your husband/wife's upbringing
 - The different: recognise each other's different expectations of family traditions and husband/wife roles and work out your way of doing things
 - The negative: difficult relationships with our wider family, or childhood pain, can put a strain on our marriage. In essence, it's important to address these issues so we can understand each other and move forward as a couple

STAGES OF GROWING UP

1. Early years

Our parents' role:

- To meet our physical and emotional needs
- To set appropriate boundaries
- To show unconditional love
- To provide a role model of a good marriage

2. Teenage years

Our parents' role:

- To give increasing independence
- To continue to meet our physical and emotional needs and set boundaries
- To show unconditional love
- To teach us to consider their needs and start to give something back

3. Coming of age/leaving home

Our parents' role:

- To support and advise (we may still have looked to our parental home for advice, comfort, money or help with the laundry)
- To allow independence and encourage us to make our own decisions
- To make the transition to an adult relationship

4. Getting married

As a married couple, independence must be complete:

- A new centre of gravity
- Establish your own home as a new decision making structure
- Seek to meet each other's needs
- Develop a relationship of mutual support with parents and parents-in-law
- Put in place boundaries, not to cut you off from parents, but to connect as a couple with them in a new way

EXERCISE 1

BETWEEN THE AGES OF 8-12:

1. Where did you live?
2. What was your family car?
3. What was your favourite toy?
4. When did Jesus become more than just a word to you?

BUILDING HEALTHY FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

1. RESOLVE ANY CONFLICT

- All relationships involve some conflict
- Identify the issue causing tension and consider discussing it with parents/in-laws
- Apologise when you have been wrong
- Choose to forgive and move on

2. CONSIDER THEIR NEEDS

- Show gratitude to your parents
- Don't abuse their availability
- Maintain contact
- Take the initiative to telephone regularly, visit, enable them to see their grandchildren etc.
 - Give support
 - Offer advice when needed
 - Give practical help
 - Consider living nearby/together

3. MAKE OUR OWN DECISIONS

- Listen to parents' advice
- Never decide on an important issue with parents without discussing it together first
- Agree on your policy and stand together
- Do not give away the ups and downs of your relationship
- Provides a sense of emotional closeness

4. LOOKING AT OUR PAST

- Negative experiences from our past can affect the way we react to our partner
- Can lead to buried hurt and anger that comes out against our husband/wife
- Recognise childhood needs that were not met during your upbringing and any buried hurt and anger
- Adult relationships require us to accept our parents as they are/were rather than as we would like them to be/to have been

'As far as it depends on you live at peace with everyone.' Romans 12:18

'Honour your father and mother.' Exodus 20:12

EXERCISE 2: REFLECT ON YOUR UPBRINGING

A. Your immediate family relationships

The big circle drawn below represents yourself. Draw circles to represent the members of your immediate family.

1. Each of you spend three to four minutes drawing circles according to the closeness of the relationships between your immediate family as you were growing up, where:

Touching = relationship (i.e., good, open communication)

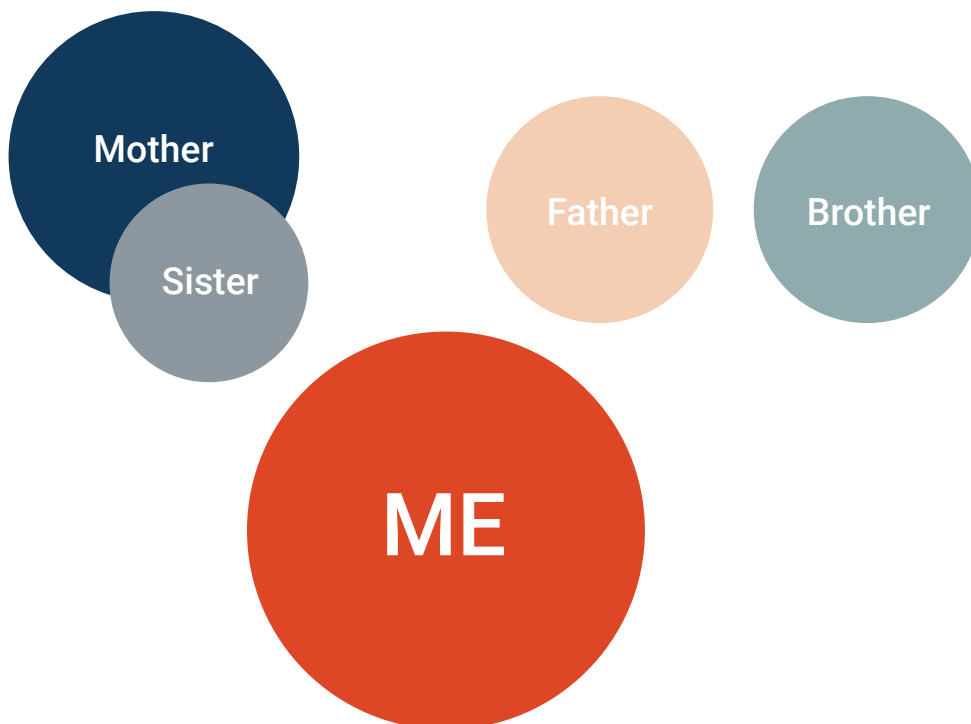
Overlapping = close relationship (i.e., good, open communication and conflict well resolved)

Separate = lack of relationship (i.e., divorced, separated or no communication)

2. Mark in the names.

3. Look at each other's arrangements.

For example:



B. Your parents'/step-parents' (or whoever brought you up) relationship with you.

Please consider the following questions and tick the relevant boxes:

Did your parents or step-parents

**Father or
Step-Father**

**Mother or
Step-Mother**

(tick if 'Yes')

Praise you as a child?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meet your physical needs (food, clothes, home etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Give you a sense of security?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect your uniqueness?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage you in your development?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Set clear rules / appropriate boundaries for you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comfort you when you were upset?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Give you increasing freedom appropriate to your age?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Give you presents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take an interest in your life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Treat their children equally?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Admit their mistakes and apologise when necessary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forgive you for your mistakes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have realistic expectations of what was appropriate for your age?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accept your friends?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help you relate well to your siblings and peers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Establish clear family rules?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Give discipline in a consistent and fair manner?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend ample time with you (i.e. play with you, talk to you, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Show you physical affection (i.e., hug you, kiss you, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C. Your parents'/step-parents' relationship with each other

(or primary adult relationship you observed as you grew up)

Did your parents or step-parents	Yes	Sometimes	No	Don't know
Have a strong, loving relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Show interest in each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have fun together?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend time together on their own?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Show each other affection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help each other in small and big tasks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage each other with praise and appreciation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Show each other respect?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communicate honestly & directly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listen to each other without interrupting or criticising?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resolve conflicts effectively?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Apologise to and forgive each other when appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Give each other presents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have mutual interests?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Show a willingness to negotiate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Remain faithful to each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

When you've finished A, B and C above, please discuss the following questions together:

- What do you need to be grateful for from your relationship with your parents?
- Did you have any unmet childhood needs?
- Are you aware of these adversely affecting your marriage?
- Are you aware of the benefits to your marriage/family life through imitating your parents/step-parents/main caregivers?
- Are you aware of ways you adversely affect your marriage/family life through imitating your parents/step-parents/main caregivers?

HEALING CHILDHOOD PAIN

1. Recognise unmet childhood needs

- Do not be surprised if you encounter strong feelings as you do this
- Give God permission to open your heart and express your feelings to Him

2. Grieve with each other

- Allow your husband or wife to talk about what has been lost and give him / her emotional support.
- Receive comfort from your partner but do not demand it

3. Forgive

- Give up any desire to repay the hurt
- Give up continuing expectations and longings of what you have wanted your parents or others to be for you
- Remember forgiveness is an ongoing act of the will and is essential for healing

4. Look to God and move on

- Nothing is beyond God's power to heal and restore
- Pray for yourself and each other
- Ask God to heal the sense of loss and to help you to know His love
- Dwell on the promises of God in the Bible
- Believe God's unconditional love for you as you are now
- Do not use childhood pain as an excuse for not meeting your partner's needs

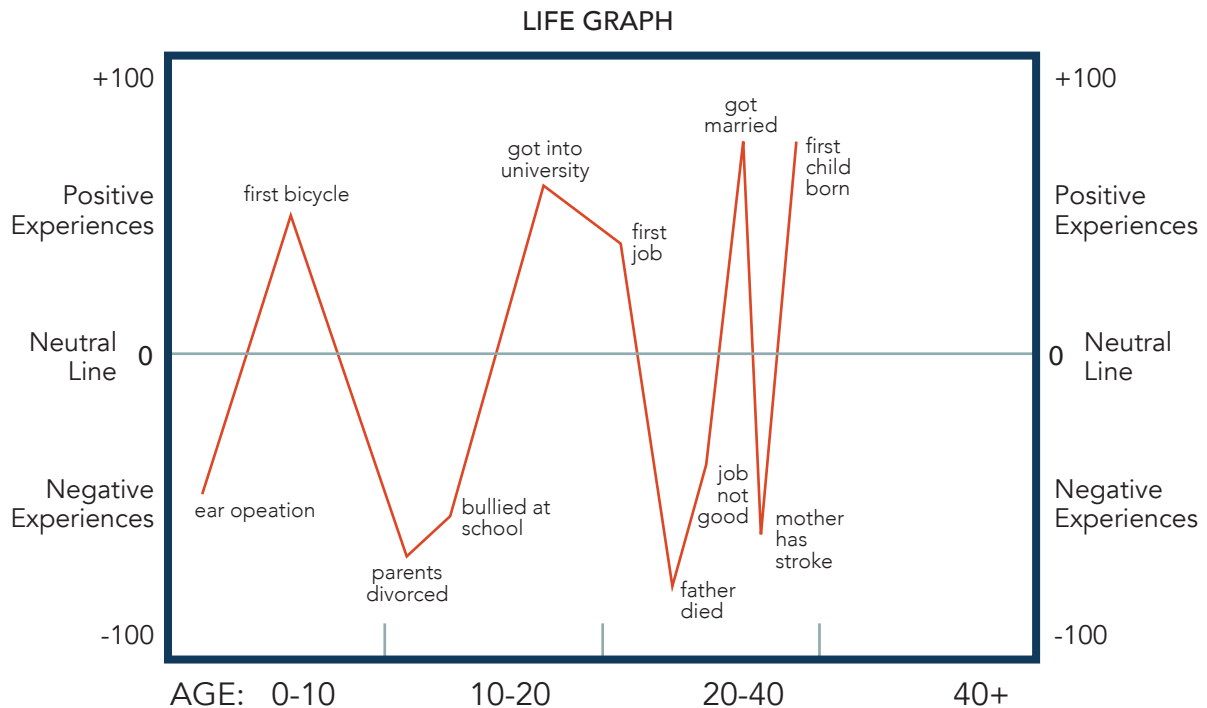
Supporting each other

Ask your husband or wife if there's one thing they're concerned about at the moment. Then, if you're comfortable praying, pray for each other. Otherwise express your support in some other way.

EXERCISE 1: RELATING TO PARENTS

A. Being aware of the past

Spend ten minutes filling in your "Life Graph" overleaf as in the example below.



- Record the most significant events that come to mind
- Put positive experiences, ranked between 0 and +100, above the "neutral line"
- Put negative experiences, ranked between 0 and -100, below the "neutral line"
- Show each other your graphs
- Consider whether you have been able to forgive those who have hurt you
- Tell your husband or wife what you felt then and what you feel now about these events
- Where others have hurt one of you during your upbringing, check that you are both going through the four steps for "healing childhood pain"

LIFE GRAPH

A. Supporting each other

Each of you should fill in the following questions on your own and then exchange your answers. Please consider carefully what your partner has written. Discuss the significant issues – pay particular attention to an issue that your partner has highlighted, and you have not. You may need to adjust some of your own answers as a result.

1. Do your parents (seek to) control or interfere in your decisions and the direction of your lives? If so, specify the ways.

2. Is there an unhealthy emotional dependence between you and a parent, or your partner and a parent? If so, in what way?

3. Are there issues relating to your parents (in-law) that cause tension or arguments between you?

For example: "There is often tension between us when I have spent a long time on the telephone with one of my parents."

4. In what way could you support your partner with regard to your parents and in-laws?

5. In what way could your partner support you with regard to your parents and in-laws?

6. Do you or your partner have unmet childhood needs? If so, how could you help your partner?

How could your partner help you?

B. Supporting your parents

1. How could you express your gratitude towards your parents (and / or parents-in-law)?

2. How can you best keep in touch with your parents (and / or parents-in-law)? telephone calls, timing and length of visits, and other ways of communicating with them.

3. Consider the needs of your parents and parents-in-law. From the list on the next page, check the relevant boxes for the needs of both your parents and parents-in-law. Besides the boxes you have checked, write the ways you could help meet those needs.

Husband's parent(s)	Needs:	Wife's parent(s)
<div><div></div><div></div></div>	Advice	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div><div></div></div>	Companionship	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div><div></div></div>	Conversation	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div><div></div></div>	Encouragement	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div><div></div></div>	Practical Help	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div><div></div></div>	Security	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div><div></div></div>	Understanding	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div><div></div></div>	Other Need	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div><div></div></div>	Other Need	<div><div></div><div></div></div>

WEEK SIX

**GOOD
SEX**



- Tell each other what you enjoy – don't leave it to guess work
- Seek to meet your partner's desires rather than your own
- Don't bury problems – talk about them and seek help if necessary

HOW WE VIEW SEX MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

1. OUR CONSUMER SOCIETY

- Sex largely separated from relationship and commitment
- Desire for instant gratification
- Assumption that good sex can only be found in a new relationship or an affair

2. A WAY OF DEVELOPING INTIMACY

- A gift from God for our pleasure and enjoyment within marriage
- A way of communicating love that goes beyond words
- Expresses and deepens the "one flesh" bond
- Potential for growth of sexual relationship
- Designed to develop over a lifetime as mutual love and understanding grow

3. A VITAL PART OF A STRONG AND HEALTHY MARRIAGE

- Not the icing on the cake but a vital ingredient of the cake itself
- Not to be compartmentalised
- Sexual intimacy affects every other part of our marriage and vice versa
- Often the first casualty of tiredness or laziness
- May need to make lifestyle changes e.g. increase exercise, change eating habits

4. PROBLEMS CAN BE WORKED THROUGH

- Most couples struggle with their sexual relationship at one time or another
- Sexual desire can and must be reawakened
- Don't regard as "your" issue or "my" issue but "our" issue
- Most problems resolved through better understanding and making changes
- Some involve deeper issues from the past – can be healed and restored through prayer and professional help



SIX QUALITIES OF GREAT LOVERS

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Communication | Requires vulnerability and enables us to understand each other better |
| 2. Tenderness | Take time over lovemaking; focus on giving to one another |
| 3. Responsiveness | Responding sexually can give our partner a sense of confidence |
| 4. Romance | Create the setting for lovemaking; learn the art of seduction |
| 5. Anticipation | Our mind is our most important sexual asset; communicate your desire |
| 6. Variety | Creativity and romance produces excitement; vary the atmosphere |

EXERCISE 1: TALKING ABOUT SEX

A. Rate your lovemaking

Against the list of six qualities below, circle the number against each category – for yourself (A) and your spouse (B) – which you feel best describes your sexual relationship, where 1 = not so good and 5 = very good.

A. You	Qualities	B. Your Spouse
1 2 3 4	Communication	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Tenderness	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Responsiveness	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Romance	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Anticipation	1 2 3 4
1 2 3 4	Variety	1 2 3 4

Which area(s) do you need to work on?

B. Identify problem areas

1. What, if any, are the differences between you, as husband and wife, in the way you respond sexually?

Are these differences having a positive or negative effect on your marriage?

If positive, give the main reason:

If negative, give the main reason:



2. Does your self-esteem and body image affect your lovemaking negatively?

If so, explain why:

How could your husband or wife help you?

3. What, if any, unresolved emotions (e.g., resentment, hurt, unforgiveness, anxiety or guilt) affect your lovemaking in any way?

If so, how?

How could these be resolved?

4. Does your lovemaking lack excitement?

If so, what new element would you like to see introduced?

5. Does over-tiredness take a toll on the frequency of your lovemaking?

If so, identify the reason for the over-tiredness

What could re-energise you? (e.g., exercise, better communication, resolving past hurt, planning and prioritising sex, more sleep, less going out, more fun and less work)

6. Do you feel free to talk together about your lovemaking?

If the answer is yes, write down two or three things your husband or wife has told you recently that have enhanced your lovemaking:

If the answer is no, identify some of the reasons for your difficulty:

Suggest something you would like your husband or wife to say that you have never heard:



C. Write the script

List below the different criteria that would create good lovemaking for you.

Be specific about the things such as timing, taking the initiative, anticipation, atmosphere, place, romance, tenderness, seduction and arousal (foreplay), afterwards. (We cannot guess each other's expectations.)

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

D. Seek to understand each other better

- Once you have finished, read each other's responses to section A, B, and C.
- Now start to talk about what the other has expressed – beginning where you feel most comfortable.
- Give each other the opportunity to ask questions about what you have written.
- Tell your husband or wife what surprised you most. Ask for clarification if you do not fully understand.

Happiness and fulfilment in this area of our marriage will depend on meeting our husband or wife's needs, as we would like them to meet ours. Be careful not to push your partner to fulfil your desires – look to meet theirs.

Plan times of making love (even if it seems contrived at first) to fulfil what you both feel comfortable with from Section C of the exercise "Talking about Sex" (Page 54)