

MARRIAGE

20 BIBLICAL BUILDING BLOCKS TO A BETTER MARRIAGE:

- 1) God and ministry centered
- 2) Facing the Enemy
- 3) Prayer & Word
- 4) Fulfill proper roles
- 5) Commitment
- 6) Positive Regard
- 7) Forgiveness
- 8) Growth
- 9) Togetherness
- 10) Follow Golden Rule
- 11) Kindness, Compassion, Gentleness, Patience
- 12) Holy Spirit
- 13) Pursue Peace and Harmony
- 14) Good Communication

- 15) Love
- 16) Sex & Romance
- 17) Prioritizing Time
- 18) Coping with Money
- 19) Agreeing on Children issues
- 20) Coping with In-laws and Other Outside Influences

BLOCK #1: GOD AND MINISTRY CENTERED

One issue that some in our churches do not understand or do not intend to follow is for the importance of Christians ALWAYS marrying Christians:

UNEQUALLY YOKED

God intended for believers to ALWAYS marry other believers (II Cor 6:14-15). Some practical reasons include:

- 1) A common Treasure
- 2) A common blueprint
- 3) A common strength
- 4) Common values
- 5) Synchronized

If one partner is an unbeliever, the believing partner should seek to attract the unbelieving partner to the Lord with a winsome lifestyle (I Pet 3:1-6). It is preferable to stay married and pray and work to see the unbelieving partner come to the Lord, and then see the marriage develop into a strong Christian relationship.

PUTTING GOD FIRST

The Bible says to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Mt 6:33). The only way to have a strong marriage over the long term is to put God at the center of the marriage and make Him a partner and the ultimate Head. A marriage based on a threesome of God, Husband and a Wife will be strong and hard to break (Eccl 4:9-12).

A marriage partnership centered on fulfilling the work of the ministry that God has given us will be very rewarding both here on earth and in heaven. Working together as a partnership to fulfill the Great Commandment (love God and people) and Great Commission (make disciples) gives us those common goals that keep us headed in the same direction.

BLOCK #2: FACING THE ENEMY

Following are 12 Enemies to our marriages:

1) **Satan & other fallen angels, Flesh, World**

Solution: spiritual disciplines

2) **Selfishness/Stubbornness**

Solution: mutual submission (Eph 5:21)

3) **Laziness**

Solution: work hard

4) **Disappointment/Discontentment** (about spouse, circumstances, self)

Solution: Realistic expectations; Acceptance

5) **Hurt & Unhappiness**

Solution: Joy & healing from God

6) **Hectiness (too busy)**

Solution: Time together

7) **Negativity**

Solution: Be positive

8) **Fear**

Solution: Courage

9) **Boredom**

Solution: Eternal perspective; have fun with spouse

10) **Drifting apart**

Solution: Work on becoming as one (intimate)

11) **Insensitivity**

Solution: Be sensitive

12) **Confusion**

Solution: Knowledge

BLOCK #3: PRAYER & WORD

WORD

Learning and obeying the Word leads to many blessings and benefits to us, including a great marriage. Making a commitment to regularly be in the Word, and to obey what is learned, will greatly increase the probability of a great marriage (Lk 6:46-49, 11:28; Joshua 1:8; James 1:22-25).

PRAYER

Do you want a great marriage? Pray and ask God! We have the privilege to pray for the desires of our heart. Also, no matter how bad our marriage is now, we need to know that NOTHING is impossible with God, so never stop praying! (Mt 7:7-10; Mk 10:27)

BLOCK #4: FULFILL PROPER ROLES

GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

Permanent partnership & relationship; covenant/contract/vow before God and people; partners have become as "one flesh"; we should not separate what God has joined together; God did not intend for divorce, and hates divorce (Gen 2:18-25; Mt 19:3-8; Rm 7:2; I Cor 7: 10, 27,39; Pv 2:16-17; Mal 2:13-16; Num 30:2).

The primary purpose of marriage is to create a partnership which combines male and female characteristics

together in order to reflect God's character and glorify Him (Gen 1:26-28). From this partnership, we should glorify God by being fruitful in advancing His kingdom (Gen 1:28, 9:1).

BIBLICAL ROLES

HUSBAND: LOVING LEADER (family provider, protector, spiritual leader/teacher).

A husband should love his wife like Jesus loves the church; a husband should love his wife so much that he is willing to die for her.

A husband's primary role is to be the head/leader of the marriage and the family (I Cor 11:3, Eph 5:22-23, Gen 3:16, I Cor 14:35, I Tim 2:12, Num 30). Included in this role are responsibilities to: love and lead (Eph 5:25-33, Gen 3:16), provide (Gen 2:15, Gen 3:17-19, I Tim 5:8), protect (Gen 3:17), be a spiritual teacher (Gen 2:17) and to treat his wife as an equal (I Pet 3:7, I Cor 11:3).

A husband should demonstrate his love by praying for his wife (Jn 17:20), humbly serving his wife (Jn 13:12-17), being gentle towards his wife and not place heavy burdens on her (Mt 11:28-30), letting nothing separate his love to his wife (Rm 8:38:39), and being willing to die for his wife (Jn 10:11).

WIFE: SUBMISSIVE HELPER/PARTNER (home manager; husband & children a priority).

A wife should submit to her husband's authority like the church submits to the authority of Jesus.

A wife's primary role is to be a helper to her husband (Gen 2:18). Included in this role are responsibilities to: submit to and respect her husband (Eph 5:22-24,33, Col 3:18, I Pet 3:1-6), be a companion (Gen 2:18), give life and nurture children (Gen 3:20), create beauty (Gen 3:6, 16) and make managing the home her priority (Titus 2:3-5, I Tim 5:14, Pv 31:27, Pv 14:1).

Submission includes: knowing, listening and following your husband (Jn 10:14, 26-27, 12:26), not quarrelsome (Pv 21:9), and enduring trials with the husband knowing that God will someday reward (I Pet 4:12-13).

BOTH:

Both are to submit to each other out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21). Both are to love each other as Christ loved them (Eph 5: 1-2). Both are to leave their families, cleave to each other, and become as one (Gen 2:24, Mt 19:5, Mk 10:6-9, Eph 5:31), and to give themselves unreservedly to each other sexually (I Cor 7:2-5, Song of Solomon).

Based on Ephesians 5, it can be said that the relationship between the Husband and Wife should be similar to the relationship between Christ (husband) and the Church (wife). Based on that analogy, one author has derived two questions that really cut to the core:

- 1) Husband: Do I love my wife enough to die for her?
- 2) Wife: Do I love my husband enough to live for him?

Husbands: A husband should love his wife like Jesus loves His church. A husband should pray for his wife (Jn 17:20), humbly serve his wife (Jn 13:12-17), be gentle towards his wife and not place heavy burdens on her (Mt 11:28-30), let nothing separate his love to his wife (Rm 8:38:39), and be willing to die for his wife (Jn 10:11).

Wives: A wife should submit to her husband. Submission includes: knowing, listening and following your husband (Jn 10:14, 26-27, 12:26), not quarrelsome (Pv 21:9), and enduring trials with the husband knowing that God will someday reward (I Pet 4:12-13).

Practical Principles

- 1) For a marriage to thrive and reach it's full potential, both spouses need to fulfill their biblical roles.
- 2) We should unconditionally fulfill our role, even if our spouse does not fulfill their role.
- 3) We can not force our spouse to fulfill their role; we should fulfill our role and pray for our spouse to fulfill their role.
- 4) If we do a good job in fulfilling our role, then:
 - God is pleased
 - We are blessed
 - Our marriage is strengthened
 - Our children are blessed and see a positive role model
 - It is easier for our spouse to fulfill their role

(Selected Biblical references: I Cor 11:3; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; I Pet 3:1-8; Titus 2:3-5; I Tim 5:14; Pv 14:1; Pv 31:10-31)

QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) What is my philosophy regarding divorce? Does my philosophy line up with scripture? Am I committed to stay married irregardless of whatever problems/challenges come my way?

- 2) Have I started teaching my children God's design for marriage?

- 3) How am I doing in fulfilling my biblical role as a husband or wife? Am I accepting of the role that God has given me? If not, what is blocking my acceptance and what can be done to correct the problem? What are areas that I need improvement?

- 4) Have I started teaching my children God's intended marriage roles?

- 5) How is my spouse doing in fulfilling their role? What can I do to make fulfilling their role easier (nagging them is not an acceptable answer!)?

WRONG REASONS TO MARRY

Sometimes people marry for the wrong reasons. Here are some wrong reasons:

- 1) External pressure
- 2) To get even with old lover
- 3) To get out of the parental home
- 4) To further a career
- 5) Power
- 6) Security
- 7) Money
- 8) Prestige

- 9) Simply to say that they did

MYTHS ABOUT MARRIAGE

Here are some myths about marriage:

- 1) Marriage will end my aloneness
- 2) Marriage will heal my brokenness
- 3) Marriage will ensure my happiness
- 4) Marriage is God's plan for everyone
- 5) There is one and only one person who I must find and marry

BLOCK #5: COMMITMENT

Total commitment is a willingness to share everything with our spouse, especially ourselves. We build a trustworthy commitment with:

- . Honesty
- . Dependability
- . Faithfulness

Part of the needed commitment is to not give up on the marriage no matter what problems arise.

Here are 4 Trust Breakers to Avoid:

- 1) Abandonment (emotional/physical)
- 2) Abuse (emotional/physical/sexual/verbal)
- 3) Addictions (alcohol/drugs/sexual)
- 4) Adultery (emotional/physical)

MARRIAGE FAITHFULNESS

In a survey of 1000 Christianity Today readers, 23 % admitted to having sex with someone other than their spouse!! Why??

What can be done to minimize the possibility of adultery? Here are some ideas:

1) Teach & remember that the Bible condemns adultery. Adultery is ALWAYS wrong! (Pv 6:20-35; Acts 15:20,29; Heb 13:4; I Cor 6:19-20; I Tim 1:10; Ex 20:14; Duet 5:18; Mt 19:18; Lk 18:20; I Thes 4:3-8)

2) Learn from the bad example of David & Bathsheba (2 Sam 11 & following)

3) Don't try to rationalize or make excuses:

"We hid the truth. Our marriage was never good".

"In private, she was not what she appeared in public".

"I never loved her".

"She didn't understand me".

"She/he was not meeting my needs".

"I deserve better".

4) Win the battle early -- in the mind! (James 1:13-15)

5) Build "hedges" or "walls" (Is 5:1-5; Job 1:10; Ps 80:8-13, 89:40)

One experts' hedges:

a) Avoid dining or traveling with a member of opposite sex if possible. If unavoidable, try to have a 3rd person along, or at least let your spouse know right away.

b) Be careful about touching (hugs, etc.)

- c) Be careful about compliments -- compliment clothes or hairstyle, not person herself.
 - d) Avoid flirtation or suggestive comments, even in jest.
 - e) Remind your spouse often that you love them and that you are committed to them (marriage vows).
- 6) Be careful in selecting your best friends.
 - 7) Watch out for office romances.
 - 8) Avoid movies, TV programs, books, and magazines that lower inhibitions.
 - 9) Work on meeting the needs of your spouse. Treat your spouse special.
 - 10) Don't let your marriage go stale -- revive it if necessary. Some ideas:
 - a) Date regularly
 - b) Make a point of talking every day for at least 10 minutes
 - c) Take up sports or hobbies you can do together
 - d) Take walks together
 - e) Serve together in church
 - f) Each Sunday evening, share your daily schedules for the coming week
 - g) If you can tell something is bugging your spouse, gently ask them about it
 - h) Remember the 3 Cs: Communication, Compromise & Consideration
 - i) Other??

MARRIAGE VOW

"I take you to be my lawfully wedded wife/husband,

**to have and to hold,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness, and in health,
to love and to cherish,
till death us do part,**

BLOCK #6: POSITIVE REGARD

Components of developing a positive regard between spouses include:

- Understanding differences between men and women
- Knowing each other
- Accepting each other
- Respecting each other
- Trusting each other
- Honoring each other

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Mental/Emotional/Psychological

- 1) Women tend to be more personal than men -- women have a deeper interest in developing relationships and are more concerned about people and feelings; men are more task and "conqueror" oriented.

- 2) Women tend to become a intimate part of their surroundings (ie. people & things around them) -- (eg. the house becomes an extension of the women, therefore any criticism of the house is taken personally).
- 3) Women tend to find their identity in close relationship, men via their vocation.
- 4) Women often need more time to adjust to changes.
- 5) Women tend to express their hostility verbally, men tend to be more violent.
- 6) Men tend to be more aggressive, take greater risks, have a greater need to prove themselves, and are more achievement oriented and driven.
- 7) Men tend to be thinkers (75%); women tend to be feelers (75%)
- 8) Men tend to be more task oriented; women tend to be more people/relationship oriented.

Sexual differences

WOMEN	MEN	MEN
* Relationship to menstrual cycle driven	* fairly constant, testosterone	* stimulated
by tender touching	* sight	
* attracted by personality	* less discriminating, more physical oriented	
* needs extended emotional, mental & physical preparation	* little or no preparation	

Intuitive differences

Women catch subliminal messages faster and more accurately than men

Communication differences

- * Women generally far more verbal
- * A husband's inability or unwillingness to reveal their feelings to their wives is a common complaint of

women

- * Compromise is often needed
- * Time must be reserved
- * Men are to cheer up their wives

KNOWING EACH OTHER

In addition to the general differences between men and women, there are other factors that make us different from our spouse:

- genetics
- birth order
- family background
- experiences
- biological
- cultural expectations

Past

- Ancestral past
- Personal past

Present

- Needs
- Emotions

Future

- Goals
- Dreams

ACCEPTING EACH OTHER

Romans 15:7 says "accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God".

Part of accepting your spouse is to avoid unfair judging (Mt 7:1-5). Being judgmental can be destructive to a relationship. As Pastor Loren says, "we should focus on pulling the weeds from our own yards, not focus on

pointing out and pulling the weeds in our spouse's yard".

Part of accepting your spouse is to be aware of the differences between you and they. Here are some various types of differences:

DIFFERENT PERSONALITY TYPES

Social Interaction: INTROVERTS vs EXTROVERTS

Gather/Use Info: SENSERS vs INTUITIVES

Assess/Decide: THINKERS vs FEELERS
INITIATORS vs RESPONDERS
TASK vs RELATIONSHIP oriented

Analytical vs Driver vs Idea vs People oriented

TYPE "A" vs TYPE "B"

From Steve Stephen's Book:

- o Extroverts vs Introverts
- o Leapers vs Lookers
- o Outliners vs Detailers
- o Spenders vs Savers
- o Planners vs Benders
- o Scurriers vs Amblers
- o Thinkers vs Feelers
- o Dreamers vs Workers
- o Collectors vs Tossers
- o Jugglers vs Holders

RESPECTING EACH OTHER

1) **Thinking:** our thoughts shape our perspective.

If we think of our spouses as special, they become special. If we think poorly of them, that is what they become in our eyes.

2) **Feeling**

- o Appreciation
- o Consideration
- o Inspiration

3) **Speaking**

4) **Acting**

- o Friendship Love
- o Sacrificial Love
- o Protective Love

TRUSTING EACH OTHER

The only person who is totally trustworthy and who will never break our trust is God (Pv 3:5, 16:20). Our ultimate trust should be in God, not in any person (Jer 17:5-9). However, we should trust our spouse (expect the best, not the worst), and earn trust from our spouse by being faithful and worthy of trust.

HONORING EACH OTHER

The Bible says that we should "praise each other" (Pv 31:28; Eph 4:29), "honor others above yourself" (Rm 12:10), and "look out for the interests of others" (Phil 2:3-4).

BLOCK #7: FORGIVENESS

Following are biblical principles of Forgiveness:

1) Forgive quickly. "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph 4:26-27, 31-32).

- ☐ Don't keep score (I Cor 13:5).
- ☐ Forgive as Jesus forgives you, which is totally (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13)
- ☐ Don't keep record of past wrongs -- wipe slate clean (Hosea 3:1)
- ☐ Keep forgiving (Mt 18:21-35)
- ☐ If we refuse to forgive others, God can refuse to forgive our sins (Mt 6:14-15)

BLOCK #8: GROWTH

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The best way to deal with conflicts is to avoid them in the first place. Sometimes conflicts arise because of negative/wrong thinking. Here are some negative thought traps to avoid:

- 1) Personalizing - thinking that all situations and events revolve around you.
- 2) Magnifying - blowing negative events out of proportion
- 3) Minimizing - glossing over the positive factors (eg, overlooking the fact that almost everything went well at an event or party; discounting a compliment).
- 4) Either/Or (all or nothing) thinking - "either" I'm a successful spouse "or" a total failure
- 5) Taking events out of context (eg, after a delightful day with your spouse, focusing on one or two minor negative spots)

- 6) Jumping to conclusions
- 7) Over-generalizing (eg, "never"; "always")
- 8) Self-blame - blaming the total self rather than specific behaviors than can be changed
- 9) Magical - unrealistic (fairy tale) expectations
- 10) Mind reading
- 11) Comparing

Some bad yet common styles of conflict resolution:

- Eskimo style ("freeze out"; withdraw)
- Cowboy style ("let the bullets fly"; anger released)
- Escape style ("let me out of here"; eg. getting drunk, shopping spree, walking out, workaholism)
- Manhandling style ("I don't know what happened"; violence to others)

Solution: Spirit of Reconciliation

Fleshly response: when we get hurt, we get even; blame the other person

Spirit led response: forgive; seek peace

STEPS TO RESOLVING CONFLICTS

Steps to Conflict resolution:

1) PRAY

2) Formal peace conference - quiet, unrushed setting

* Begin with affirmation - "I love you and am committed to our marriage. But I think it can be better than it

already is. Here are some ideas I have".

- * Be willing to take blame
- * Express Hurts, not Hostility
- * Make Direct Statements
- * Make "I feel" statements, not "You" statements
- * Avoid "Never" and "Always"
- * Seek solutions

3) If needed, seek outside help (Pv 11:14)

4) Still need help? Call in the professionals.

Another perspective of Conflict Resolution:

- 1) Adopt a learner's posture
- 2) Listen with your hearts (Pv 15:31)
- 3) Keep our emotions under control (Jm 1:20; Eph 4:31)
- 4) Think before we speak
- 5) Focus on our part of the blame
- 6) Keep short accounts

Here is another perspective on resolving conflicts:

- 1) Know yourself
- 2) Think [analyze what's really behind the conflict; think about whether some other situation could be fueling your spouse's anger (eg, stress at work; husband with a domineering mother); put yourself in your spouse's shoes]. Avoid absolutes and avoid character assignation.
- 3) Stick to the Basics (don't dredge up past issues from past)
- 4) Keep your self out of it (argue over issues, but never allow your conflict to get personal; try to keep emotions out as best you can)

Conflict - Rational processes = Explosion

- 5) Get creative (eg, cooling off period, write a letter then flush down toilet)
- 6) Defuse the situation (eg, funny saying, take your clothes off, do some yard work or other physical activity)

Conflict - Resolution = Separation

Conflict + Resolution = Intimacy

RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS

Here are some ways to resolve disagreements:

- 1) Compromise
- 2) Agreement to disagree
- 3) Love gift (giving in without anger or bitterness)

GROWING TOGETHER

Steve Stephens has identified stages of marriage. Problems arise when couples get stuck in the questioning or disillusion stage:

- Fantasy Stage:

"This is wonderful! My partner is everything I thought they were and more!"

- Surprise Stage:

"Oh, this isn't exactly what I expected, but this is probably just a phase".

- Questioning Stage:

"What did I get myself into? Did I make a mistake?"

- Disillusion stage:

"I can't believe I'm in this situation. Why was I so blind?"

- Realistic stage:

"This relationship has some strong points and some weak points. It's not perfect, but neither am I"

- Stabilized stage:

"This relationship is made of two struggling people and if we work together we can truly be happy and fulfilled".

GOAL SETTING

One of the ways to grow together is to jointly set goals, then work together to try to reach them. Most of the growth comes in the process of working together, and sometimes the process is more rewarding than actually achieving the goal itself. Goals can be set in a variety of areas: spiritual, church, work, family, home, political, social, educational, etc.

BLOCK #9: TOGETHERNESS

Here are different types of togetherness:

- 1) Emotional (feelings)
- 2) Intellectual (sharing of ideas; deep talking)
- 3) Aesthetic (enjoying beauty; nature, arts, cultural, athletic)
- 4) Recreational (fun activities together)
- 5) Work (working together on projects)
- 6) Crisis (going through a crisis together)
- 7) Sexual (touching, cuddling, lovemaking)
- 8) Spiritual (common beliefs & goals)

DRIFTING

Drifting apart is often subtle and unintentional. Drifting can be caused by a variety of reasons including:

- External demands (eg, work)
- Natural bents (eg, self-interest, too close to parents, etc.)

BUILDING TOGETHERNESS

One way to help build togetherness is to regularly practice the "BEST" for your spouse:

Bless (speak well; do kind things; express thankfulness; pray for)

Edify (support; build up)

Share (time, activities, interests, concerns, ideas, dreams, inner thoughts, goals, spiritual walk)

Touch (non-sexual)

BLOCK #10: FOLLOW GOLDEN RULE

Putting the Golden Rule (Mt 7:12) into practice on a consistent basis will have a dramatically positive affect on your marriage. We should treat our spouse like we would like to be treated. One way to put the Golden Rule into practice is to make a commitment to humbly serve your spouse and help meet their needs (Jn 13:12-17; Gal 5:13-15). We should also practice the positive behaviors outlined in other Building Blocks like #11.

BLOCK #11: KINDNESS; COMPASSION; GENTLENESS; PATIENCE

The Bible gives us some behaviors that will help improve all of our relationships, including our marriage relationship. Here are a few important behaviors that consistently practiced will lead to a stronger marriage:

- Kindness (Eph 4:32; Col 3:12; I Pet 3:8)
- Compassion (Eph 4:32; Col 3:12); Sympathetic (I Pet 3:8)
- Gentle (Col 3:12)

- Patient; bearing with each other (Col 3:12-13)

BLOCK #12: HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit resides in us and can greatly help our marriages if we allow the Spirit to control us (and not be controlled by our fleshly natures). If controlled by the Spirit, then our lives should reflect the nine fruits of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control (Gal 5:16-23).

How do we get filled and controlled by the Spirit? Through prayer, faith, Word, submission to God, turning from sin, etc.

BLOCK #13: PURSUE PEACE AND HARMONY

The Bible encourages us to pursue peace & mutual edification (Rm 14:19); and to pursue harmony (I Pet 3:8-9). The word "pursue" means "to follow, press towards, strive for, seek after". We need to actively pursue peace and harmony by being humble and not proud (Jm 4:6), mutual submission (Eph 5:21), thinking of others and not just ourselves (Phil 2:3-4).

BLOCK #14: GOOD COMMUNICATION

AVOID NEGATIVE COMMUNICATION

Part of the way we develop good communication is to avoid negative communication patterns. Here are some negative patterns to avoid:

- Avoidance (don't talk about it)
- Withdrawal of one spouse
- Changing the topic
- Agreeing too easily
- Arguing

UNDERSTAND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN & WOMEN

Here is are some generalizations based on a psychological study:

The average man verbalizes 10,000 words per day, and 9,000 of those are used up at during the work day.

The average women verbalizes 25,000 words per day, and also uses up 9,000 words during the work day.

Come evening time, guess who want to talk! This difference in verbalizing can lead to conflict. Solution? Perhaps a compromise whereby the man makes more of an effort to talk with his wife in the evening, and have the wife be satisfied with less conversation than she would ideally like to have.

One area that most husbands are weak in is to verbalize their love for their wife on a regular basis. Men -- we need to do that! Here are some quotes from Zig Ziglar:

- Somebody once asked when a man should tell his wife he loved her. The reply was, "before someone else does!"
- Another man confessed in bittersweet irony that he loved his wife so much that it was all he could do to keep from telling her!
- Another case -- I hear of a man who hadn't told his wife he loved her in over 20 years, then shot the man who did!

Men need to say "I love you" with meaning. Most men do not verbalize their love or demonstrate affection unless he wants sex. This can lead to the wife feeling used, not loved. Solution? Verbalize our love and express affection regularly, not only when sex is desired.

One survey showed that 98% of women wished for more "verbal closeness" with their male partners, and the most frequently cited cause of anger was "he doesn't listen".

5 LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

- 1) Cliches, causal conversation
- 2) Reporting of facts
- 3) Ideas and judgements

- 4) Feelings and emotions
- 5) Open, honest sharing on a deep, personal level

PRACTICE POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

A very important key to good communication is to consistently practice positive communication. Following are some biblical principles (from Eph 4:15, 29; Col 4:6; Jm 1:19, 1:26, 3:9-12; Proverbs 16:24, 10:19, 10:32, 11:9, 11:12-13, 12:18, 12:25, 13:3, 15:1, 15:28, 16:21, 16:24, 17:9, 17:27, 21:23, 25:11, 26:20, 26:28, 29:11, 29:20; I Pet 3:10):

- Avoid unwholesome, unedifying, evil, deceitful, perverse, destructive, reckless, negative communication
- Don't share negative experiences of your spouse with others
- Sometimes better to say nothing than fuel an argument or stir up strife
- Pursue positive/edifying communication. Conversation should be "full of grace" and "seasoned with salt". Kind, gentle and pleasant words all benefit the hearer.
- Be "quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry"
- Think before you speak; don't speak in haste.
- Keep secrets and confidences.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO BETTER COMMUNICATION

Following are 5 practical steps to better communication:

- 1) Take time for one another
- 2) Speak for yourself
- 3) Understand that your partner's perceptions are different from yours
- 4) Really listen (attentive vs passive listening)

- 5) Check out what your partner is saying

WAYS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

Here are some ways to improve communication from the Navigators:

- 1) Don't assume you know - ask.
- 2) Provide an open, permissive, accepting atmosphere.
- 3) Use compliments freely.
- 4) Pray for each other, and together.
- 5) Be willing to disagree, but in a gentle way.
- 6) Concentrate on being a good listener.
- 7) Build up your mate's self-esteem.
- 8) Seek more to understand than to be understood.
- 9) When you are wrong or have sinned against your mate, admit it and ask forgiveness. Put it into words: "Will you forgive me?" and "Yes, I forgive you".

LISTENING

God gave us two ears and only one mouth -- I wonder if He was trying to tell us something! The Bible says that we should "be quick to listen, slow to speak" (Jm 1:19); we should listen before we answer (Pv 18:13); listening leads to wisdom (Pv 19:20).

Here are some steps to improve our listening skills:

- 1) Give the speaker your undivided attention

- 2) Show your attentiveness with body language
- 3) Rephrase or re-state key statements
- 4) Let your mate finish the sentence
- 5) Express your feelings (use "I feel"; avoid negatives like "you never..")
- 6) Be careful about supplying solutions, when an attentive and sympathetic listener is needed

SELF-TALK

We all engage in self-talk. Self-talk is a major driver behind our emotions, attitudes and behaviors. We need to renew and discipline our minds and engage in positive self-talk, not negative (Phil 4:6-8; Rm 12:1-2).

BLOCK #15: LOVE

Love is obviously an absolutely essential component of a strong marriage. The Bible talks about the importance of love in our relationships (Col 3:14; Gal 5:13-14; Mt 22:34-40). True love comes from God (I Jn 4:7,19). The closer we walk with God, the greater our ability to reflect God's love to our spouse. True love expresses itself in actions, not just words (I Jn 3:18).

I Corinthians 13, and I John 4:7 - 5:3 are two great passages about love.

ADVICE TO MEN

- 1) Protect your wives
- 2) Learn that your wife needs our shoulder, not our mouth - avoid lectures during stressful times; be gentle, loving and tender.

Ten Ways Husbands Can Say I Love You to Their Wives:

- 1) Provide your wife with some time away from home
- 2) Provide your wife with some time away at home
- 3) Back up your wife in front of the children
- 4) Give your wife a gift on an ordinary day
- 5) Praise your wife and tell her you love her
- 6) Be silent about your wife's shortcomings
- 7) Give your wife her own tool kit
- 8) Find your wife's strong points and use them
- 9) Keep your arguments with your wife private
- 10) Put your wife first

ADVICE TO WOMEN

How to become your husband's best friend:

- * Share common experiences together
- * Attack and conquer tragedies (and opportunities) as a couple, not as individuals
- * Make important decisions together
- * Develop a sense of humor
- * Understand your own personality traits and your husbands

BLOCK #16: SEX & ROMANCE

ROMANCE

Obstacles to Romance:

- * Familiarity
- * Complacency
- * Physical exhaustion
- * Financial burdens

Ideas to help:

- * Work on it heartily (Col 3:23)

- * Husbands -- love and honor your wives (Eph 5:25; I Pet 3:7)
- * Talk
- * Court creatively (cards, notes, non-sexual touching, neck or back rubs, flowers, kissing, serving one another, dating, night away, encouraging, cheerleading)
- * Learn the language of love (eg, verbal, touching, service, time together, gifts)
- * Focus on the fun side (eg, play sports, picnic, concert, attend a sporting event, ride bikes, movie)
- * Sex (enjoy your sexuality, become pro-active, seek mutually enjoyable sex, talk about it)

SEX

Sex is one of the least talked about but most widely practiced activities in the church. The world has a low view of sex, and unfortunately the church has sometimes taught unbiblical views about sex. Following are some Biblical truths:

1) Sex outside of marriage is ALWAYS sinful and wrong. Both adultery and fornication (pre-marital sex) are condemned (Heb 13:4; Ex 20:14; Pv 6:32-33; Acts 15: 20,29; I Cor 6:12-20).

2) Sex inside of marriage is good, wholesome, and is God's idea.

- * God created us male and female, and created us as sexual beings (male = piercer; female = pierced) (Gen 1:27).

God evaluated His creation as very good (Gen 1:31).

- * Sex is more than a physical act, it has a high spiritual significance in God's eyes (I Cor 6:15-20). The sexual relationship between a husband and wife is symbolic of the relationship between Christ (groom) and His church (bride) (Eph 5:31-32).
- * Sex is designed to help us become as one (intimate), to create children, to help meet our needs, and to bring joy into our marriages (Gen 2:24; Mt 19:5; Gen 1:28; Gen 9:1; I Cor 7:2-5; Pv 5:15-20).
- * Married couples should engage in regular sexual relations, except if both partners agree to abstain for a limited time to devote themselves to prayer (I Cor 7:2-5).

* God's Word contains a whole book devoted to the joy of marital sex -- the Song of Solomon. A few principles from the Song of Solomon include:

- Desire for sex and intimacy is good
- Communication is important
- Good sexual relationship comes after a good personal relationship
- Should not be inhibited
- Burden is on the husband to prepare the wife for a good sexual experience

* An excellent martial sexual relationship should be pursued, BUT we do need to keep sex in perspective and remember that spiritual fruit is a more important pursuit.

PRACTICAL INSIGHTS RE: SEX

I) Understanding the difference between Men and Women

There are some general differences between the sexual perspective of men and women:

MEN: tend to be stimulated by sight and words; view sex as getting; motivated by self-gratification; have a greater physical need for sex; need little if any preparation.

WOMEN: tend to be stimulated by touch; view sex as giving of themselves; often motivated by wanting to please; need extended emotional, mental & physical preparation.

II) Hindrances to a Great Sexual Relationship

- 1) Extra baggage (eg, premarital activities; child molestation; too low or too high self-esteem)
- 2) Inhibitions (caused by faulty teaching)
- 3) Fatigue
- 4) Lack of effort; lack of knowledge

III) TIPS FOR A BETTER SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP

- 1) Talk about it with your spouse
- 2) Become explorers (be creative; rule = almost anything goes IF not harmful and both spouses agree)
- 3) Become readers and learners
- 4) Be others centered (remember that Jesus said it is more blessed to give than receive; meet your spouse's sexual needs like you would like them to meet yours)
- 5) Realize that a fulfilling sexual relationship takes time and understanding
- 6) Be aware than most husbands would like their wives to be bolder and more aggressive; most wives would like their husbands to think of something besides their own pleasure
- 7) Learn to accept and live with your spouse's little annoying behaviors
- 8) Avoid domestic arguments
- 9) Profound and intimate sex does not require great expertise, but rather deep exposure of one's self and loving acceptance by the other
- 10) Be available sexually to your spouse -- don't withhold for any duration of time
- 11) Be in touch with your own sexuality
- 12) Keep the sexual performance of your spouse (and other intimate details) PRIVATE
- 13) Be encouraged that the sexual relationship can improve over time and last into our advanced years (Duet 34:7; Gen 5:3, 21:1-2)

BUILDING A STRONG MARRIAGE WHICH HAS SPARK

Some ideas:

A) Practice the 100/100 principle, not the 50/50 worldly approach

B) Practice the principles from Col 3:12-13

1) Compassion

2) Kindness

3) Humility

4) Gentleness

5) Patience

6) Bearing with each other

7) Forgiving

C) Regularly practice the "BEST" for your spouse:

Bless (speak well; do kind things; express thankfulness; pray for)

Edify (support; build up)

Share (time, activities, interests, concerns, ideas, dreams, inner thoughts, goals, spiritual walk)

Touch (non-sexual)

D) Build Fun & Romance into your Marriage

20 BIBLICAL BUILDING BLOCKS TO A BETTER MARRIAGE

SOME BASIC NEEDS OF MEN

(From “He Said, She Said”)

1. **A need for faithfulness**
2. **A need to be supported**
3. **A need for encouragement**
4. **A need to be important**
5. **A need to be praised**
6. **A need to be the head of the house**
7. **A need for sex & intimacy**

PRACTICAL WAYS TO EXPRESS LOVE TOWARDS YOUR HUSBAND

1. **Tell him often you love him**
2. **Plan menus around his tastes**
3. **Have some endearing name for him**
4. **Eagerly prepare for his homecoming**
5. **Delight in his praise for you**
6. **Like to make him smile**
7. **Comfort him when he feels bad**
8. **Often think how wonderful he is**
9. **Miss him when he’s away on trips**
10. **Praise his good qualities to friends**
11. **Gladly try to match his moods**
12. **Do your best to please him**
13. **Feel closer to him as time passes**

BLOCK #17: PRIORITIZING TIME

20 BIBLICAL BUILDING BLOCKS TO A BETTER MARRIAGE

Refer to the handouts from the series "Successfully Balancing Life's Demands" for a thorough discussion of the issue.

Here are some biblical principles:

- 1) We should be using time to serve the Lord with gladness and rejoicing (Phil 4:4; Ps 100:2).
- 2) Make the most of our time (Eph 5:15-17).
- 3) Avoid over-commitment (Acts 6:1-6).
- 4) Use time efficiently, don't waste (I Cor 9:24-27).
- 5) Need to know our limitations and take time out for rest and relaxation (Mk 6:31-32).
- 6) Time is fleeting, use wisely (Ps 90).
- 7) Plan by faith, but leave room for God to work (James 4:13-17).

BLOCK #18: COPING WITH MONEY

FINANCES

All of our money is loaned to us by the Lord. God owns all and loans to us as His managers; we will give a final accounting to Him (Mt 25:14-30; Lk 16:1-9; Lk 12:42-48, 12:16-21; I Cor 6:19-20; Ps 50:12, 89:11, 100:3). We are responsible for how we use 100% of it, not just the portion that we give to the church. Biblical principles of financial stewardship include the following:

1. Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and He will meet our earthly needs (Mt 6: 31-33). Realize that there are more important things than money, such as wisdom, integrity, and a good reputation (Pv 3:13-15, 19:1, 22:1, Eccl 2:11, 5:10).
2. Christians should give regularly and proportionately to God (I Cor 16:2, II Cor 9:7). Tithing (10% of gross income) is a standard which is useful for measuring the minimum level of giving (Gen 14:20, Lev 27:30-32, Numbers 18:20-32, Mal 3:8-10, Luke 11:42).

20 BIBLICAL BUILDING BLOCKS TO A BETTER MARRIAGE

3. Giving to God should be our first priority (Pv 3: 9-10, I Cor 16:2, Mk 12:41-44). We should also be generous with the poor and needy (Pv 21:13, 11:25, 28:27, 14:31, 19:17).
4. We should use debt and surety with extreme caution. Scripture repeatedly warns about the potential problems associated with debt and surety (Rom 13:8, James 4:13-14, Duet 28:15,44, Lam 3:37, II Chron 16:9, Prov 22:7, 27:1, 6:1-5, 11:15, 22:26-27).
5. Avoid a consumptive lifestyle and be content with what you have (Lk 12:15, 3:14, I Tim 6:6-11, Phil 4:12, Heb 13:5). Do not love money (I Tim 6:10, Eccl 5:10, Heb 13:5-6).
6. Save on a regular basis, both for short term needs and to reach long-term goals (Prov 6:6-8, I Tim 5:8), BUT avoid hoarding and placing trust in your wealth (Pv 11:28, Eccl 5:13, Lk 12:15).
7. Avoid ill-gotten gains (Pv 10:2, 15:27, 21:6), charging excessive interest (Pv 28:8), and bribery (Pv 29:4). Develop wealth through diligence (Pv 10:4).
8. Should save a little of all we earn, and if possible leave an inheritance down through our grandchildren (Pv 13:22). Should guard against financial disaster (Eccl 5:14) and diversify our investments (Eccl 11:2).
- [9. Practical suggestions include: don't spend what you don't have, pay cash for your purchases, destroy your credit cards, avoid spur of the moment purchases, avoid borrowing for depreciating items, prepare a budget to help with financial planning.]

BLOCK #19: AGREEING ON CHILDREN ISSUES

*** See Family Section *****

BLOCK #20: COPING WITH IN-LAWS AND OTHER OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

20 BIBLICAL BUILDING BLOCKS TO A BETTER MARRIAGE

COPING WITH IN-LAWS:

The Bible tells us to honor our parents (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:2), but also tells us to "leave" them when we marry. Some in-law problems come because a spouse has a stronger allegiance to their parents than their spouse. This is **WRONG!** Your spouse should come first.

Some people have very good relationships with their in-laws. If you are struggling in this area, here is some practical advice: Think of your in-laws as people, and treat them like people. Read the story of Ruth and Boaz, and realize that a good relationship with your in-laws can result in blessings to us.

COPING WITH OTHER OUTSIDE INFLUENCES:

Useful scriptures include:

Proverbs 3:5-6 "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".

Romans 8:28 "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose".

THE KEY IS TEAMWORK -- HUSBAND, WIFE and GOD working together to deal with whatever influences come our way.