

# Building a new marriage

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Introduction: How to make your marriage new! (Note: in a year it will be different whether you like it or not!)

## Principles to change your marriage

- You can change your life and your marriage by changing what you sow – Galatians 6:7-9
- Stop lying especially to yourself – Ephesians 4:25
- Recommit yourself to being a healthy, loving partner in your marriage
- Everything worthwhile and important is hard! Part of the glory of life is overcoming difficult challenges.
- Stop living by your emotions and start living by your faith

Look at the passage given to you. What is the implication of that passage on your marriage, or your responsibility in marriage?

- Psalm 127:1-2
- Luke 6:46-49
- Luke 9:23-25
- Philippians 2:1-4
- Revelation 3:14-20

Group talk: Share one thing about your spouse that made you want to marry him/her – Share around the table

## I. Communication

No relationship will thrive and grow without authentic communication. Our culture has been losing the ability to communicate very quickly. E-mail, texting, and Facebook are not communication tools, they are communication barriers.

To grow as a communicator, work on three key skills: speaking honestly, speaking in love, listening patiently, and responding gently. Wisdom is an amazing possession. Look at what James says about wisdom. How does your wisdom stack up?

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James 3:17–18 (NASB95) <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup> And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

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### A. **Speak Honestly** Ephesians 4:25 – Learn to say what you want and what you feel

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Ephesians 4:25 (NASB95)

<sup>25</sup> Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.

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**Question:** What keeps us from speaking honestly?

### B. **Speak in Love** Ephesians 4:29 – Speak with the gentleness and grace that will allow your message to be heard in a productive way.

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Ephesians 4:29 (NASB95) Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

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**Question:** What makes loving communication so difficult at times?

C. **Listen in Love** James 1:19-20 – Listen actively in a way that communicates respect and leads to understanding

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James 1:19–20 (NASB95) <sup>19</sup> *This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

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Learning to listen until you can accurately summarize both your partner’s message and their feelings is an important first step in communication. **But it is only the first step.**

**Question:** Why is it difficult to truly listen to your spouse?

D. **Respond in Love**

As you respond to your spouse, it is so important to be filled with the Holy Spirit so you can avoid the defensiveness, Counter attacks, anger, sarcasm, that can deeply wound your partner and make them sorry they ever shared with you.

1. Communicate understanding of what they shared with you – If you don’t understand ask more questions until you do.
2. Communicate a desire to find a path or solution that works for both of you
3. Share your perspective, again, working on “I” statements rather than “you” statements.

Men leadership is about modeling. St Francis in his prayer said, Lord help me seek to understand before being understood – you lead the way. (John 13:12-15)

Tomorrow, we will focus on making decisions and resolving conflict, but that needs to be built on the foundation of accurate, loving communication. If you fail here, you will have a difficult time moving forward as a couple.

## SPEAKER LISTENER

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This is an exercise designed to help you slow down your communication so you can truly understand what your spouse is saying. First, you will take time to create a wish list. A wish list is simply 3 things that you would like either **more of** or **less of** in your relationship.

### CREATING A WISH LIST

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and desires and ask for what you want in your relationship. For some, this is incredibly difficult, so work on writing these out word for word.

Active listening is the ability to hear your partner accurately and let them know you understand by restating their message along with the emotion that you hear. **Don't try to fix it, argue with it or excuse yourself. LISTEN!**

In sharing your Wish List you will be demonstrating your Assertiveness skills. In giving feedback to your partner, you will be demonstrating your active listening skills.

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

1.

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2.

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3.

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**Next**, take turns sharing your Wish Lists with each other

**SPEAKER:** Your role is to speak for yourself (I statements, not YOU statements) Describe how you would feel if your desire became reality.

**LISTENER:** When you are listening your goal is to hear both the emotions and the message that your partner is trying to give to you. Don't solve the problem, don't even say "I agree." Say something like, "I heard you saying. . ." **Then describe how your partner would feel if this wish came true.**

## II. Resolving conflict

### A. Know your tendency in conflict

If you want to change, it is important to “know yourself.” What do you *tend* to do when things get heated? Most people are more controlled by their family of origin than they are by God’s Word. Change in your tendencies can help to bring about healthier conflict. Take a minute to look at the descriptions and circle the words that apply to you.

Are you fight or flight? (Do you counterattack, give in, run away, or avoid)

Are you a negotiator or do you see things in black and white?

What are your common *tactics* in conflict? Intimidation, tears, screaming, silent treatment, logic, threats.

It is important to know your tendencies because very few of them are pleasing to God! Most, we learned by watching our parents and others we picked up either from our nature, friends, or this world. **What comes naturally is seldom right!**

When you see your tendencies, you can line them up with God’s Word and start making changes. If you are an avoider, you can ask God to give you the courage to stay in and fight with love. If you are a win/lose kind of person, you can ask God to give you the humility to honor the perspective of your partner.

### B. Goals in conflict:

- Restore unity and intimacy
- Healing
- Greater understanding
- A common understanding of *where you go from here*.

C. Process

1. Start with yourself – Make sure you understand yourself and the issue before launching – Matthew 7:1-5, Galatians 6:1-2
2. Commit to godly responses regardless of your partner's responses
3. Choose an appropriate time  
SOON! (Ephesians 4:26)  
Don't choose a time when your spouse is occupied.  
Don't choose a time when you both are exhausted
4. Bring up the issue or hurt
5. Practice speaker/listener

D. Specifically when a decision needs to be made

1. Focus on maintaining love, harmony, and unity. Take a pause break as needed throughout the discussion if this becomes at risk.
2. Pray together before starting a serious discussion. Again, choose a place that will allow you to be free from distractions. Turn off your cell phones.
3. Focus on a common goal. Agree on what the problem or issue is, so you are not trying to solve multiple problems at once or work at cross-purposes by trying to address different issues.
4. Avoid being attached to a particular outcome. Avoid stating something as absolute fact.
5. Encourage and freely share thoughts, feelings, and opinions with love, respect, and kindness. Avoid criticism or domination of each other. Strive to be open to all expressions without taking offense.
6. Watch your heart and your tone. If underneath your words is criticism, disrespect, or sarcasm, your spouse will hear them, even when your words are positive.

Guard your heart: Check your motives and intentions. If you are trying to WIN or manipulate, you will damage the marriage relationships.

Watch out for character attack, contempt (mocking, sarcasm, condescension), defensiveness, Shutting down (avoidance, refusal to discuss), emotional escalation (shouting, swearing, threatening)

7. Listen to each other carefully and without interruption and request clarification as needed.
8. Take the time to make a unified decision. If one person defers too often in these decisions, bitterness will tend to build.

### III. Practicing Forgiveness

1. Forgiveness is an act of the will in obedience to the Lord (Luke 17:3-10, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13) Forgiveness does not instantly bring healing to your heart – it begins the process of healing.
2. It's important to understand that you will almost never feel like forgiving a person who has wronged you. If you *wait until you're ready*, you will never truly forgive.
3. Forgiveness is not minimizing nor excusing the sin. Forgiveness indeed begins with the clear understanding that you have been wronged. If you are angry without cause, the challenge is not to forgive, but to deal with your own sinful reactions. (Ephesians 4:30-32)
4. Forgiveness is not based on merit (Col 3:13). Just as the Lord's forgiveness is based on grace, so must our forgiveness. We forgive not because the person deserves to be forgiven, but because the Lord has forgiven us.
5. Just as God makes a decision to remember our sins no more (Isaiah 43:25) so we can make that same decision. We cannot forget (pretend it never happened), but we can determine never to bring it up again, by taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5)
6. Forgiveness is the beginning of the battle. We must also put aside anger and bitterness along with all malice (Ephesians 4:31). Once we forgive, the future battles deal not with the offender's sin (we've already forgiven that), but with our sin of holding on to anger. Our response needs to be to ask forgiveness for our own sin, not to continue to focus on the other person's sin by forgiving over and over.
7. Understand Satan's will is for you to withhold forgiveness (Ephesians 4:26). He wants to use this to build a wedge in your relationship so that you don't reflect the relationship of Jesus with his church. He works by planting thoughts in your mind and then making you think that they are your thoughts. (Matthew 16:21-23)

## IV. SCOPE

The goal of marriage is not to think alike, but to think together.

Goal: Learn to understand, appreciate, and work with your partner's differences. In the end how to communicate respect and work with another's differences will determine your relationship compatibility.

Key is to learn that different is not right/wrong – it is different.

- A. **Social:** The Social trait considers one's behavior in regard to social situations.

The social trait simply looks at the scale of being extroverted or introverted.

Extroverted people will tend to enjoy large groups of people and tend to have a faster pace of life. Dangers of extroverts is that they can become shallow and not value quiet time with their spouse.

Social introverts tend to prefer small groups and even time alone. Sometimes, they can become reclusive or cut off from others.

It's important to understand your differences, or, if you're alike, the dangers of your tendencies. Talk through your scores and discuss how this plays itself out in your marriage.

- B. **Change:** This trait reflects a person's openness to change, flexibility, and interest in new experiences.

People who scored high in change, obviously like change more. They are flexible, unconventional, and open to new things. Sometimes, they can love something new just because it is new. They will tend to battle with contentment and have *happy feet* (looking for the next thing).

People with low change scores tend to be a little more down to earth and practical. They like routine and change will be difficult for them and actually increase stress.

This is an important area when you are different. Your difference can actually help you to balance each other, but only if you respect the perspective of the other (I guess this is true in everything)

- C. **Organized:** This trait reflects how organized and determined a person is in his or her daily life and work. It also reflects persistence in pursuing goals.

People who score high in organization are methodical and well organized. Being organized is a high value for them. They are goal oriented and tend to think things out very well. This tendency can get out of balance and lead to

perfectionism or obsessive/compulsive behavior. People with high organizational scores can also become very critical of others who are low in this area.

Those who score low on organization tend to be more spontaneous. They may also be less careful, less focused, and more likely to be distracted from tasks. They are often easygoing and will take time to *sit and talk, even when there are things to be done*. A danger is that they can become careless or disorganized.

This is a difficult issue because people with high scores will tend to devalue those with low scores as lazy, unfocused, or disorganized. They will often tend to *parent their spouse*. Those with low scores will tend to devalue those with high scores as task oriented or driven.

If you have significant differences here, again communication and respect is critical. Don't expect your partner to be something they aren't! Accept them as they are.

- D. **Pleasing:** This trait reflects how considerate and cooperative a person is in his or her daily interactions with others.

People with high scores tend to be trusting, friendly, and cooperative. They value getting along with others and are considerate and helpful. Optimistic about people, they view others as basically honest, decent, and trustworthy. As a result, people with high scores can be naïve, or compromise their own values or thoughts for the sake of peace.

People with Low Pleasing Scores tend to be confident, and assertive. They can be more direct and less tactful in conversation. They will also tend to be more realistic in their evaluations of people, but sometimes that can become skeptical or cynical.

If you scored low, probably a key growth area is learning to listen. It will go against your natural grain, but it will be a blessing to your relationship. If you scored high, a key growth area is learning to speak honestly.

- E. **Emotionally Steady:** This trait reflects the tendency to stay relaxed and calm even when faced with stress.

Those who score high on emotionally steady are calm and less prone to stress reactions. They are able to be emotionally stable even when confronted with stressful situations, so much so, that at times they can come off as uncaring or not aware of what is going on.

Those who score low on this scale typically react more dramatically to stress. When faced with challenges, they are prone to experience upsetting feelings such as anxiety, anger, or depression. In extreme situations they can become emotionally fragile or sensitive.

If you have differences this is a great place for conversation and respect. Learn to value the other person and take their tendencies into consideration when stress hits. If you are high on this scale, learn to listen more to your spouse as he/she will probably spot problems before you do. If you are low, learn to value your spouse's steadiness and let that give you confidence.

F. Reminders for dealing with personality differences

1. Don't try to change your partner's personality. It won't work!
2. Be responsible for yourself. The fact that personality traits are generally pervasive throughout life does not give you an excuse to not learn behaviors that will positively contribute to your marriage. For example, in order to serve your spouse you can learn to pick up after yourself even though a mess in the kitchen or dirty clothes on the floor doesn't bother you.
3. Remember the positive aspects of your partner's personality that attracted you to him or her in the first place.
4. Consider where you may be out of balance in your own personality and behavior. Think of strategies that could bring more balance to your life. Don't ever pull the "*that's just the way I am*" excuse.
5. Use your self-awareness to comment out loud on what you're doing and why you're doing it. For example, you might say, "I know it's a little hard to talk to me this evening. I'm very concerned about a deadline at work, and with my personality, I always get a little more focused, quiet, and hard to reach when something's on my mind. Please know it's not about you. We're OK. I just need to get through this deadline, OK?"

V. **Where do we go from here? Ephesians 5:15-17**

- A. Schedule a regular time each month to talk about your relationship and what is happening in your lives. This is an important time to *get on the same page and track improvement*. A great idea is to specifically develop a **couple journal** so you can write down insights and thanksgivings.
- B. At your first time, talk about what you've learned from this workshop and what *next steps* you've identified – WRITE IT DOWN for review!

- C. During subsequent times, review the inventory. Thank God for the strengths and discuss the growth areas as to what changes you would like to make based on what you see.
- D. Set some simple goals based on B & C
- E. Create a thanksgiving journal that you can note blessings and victories that God has given you over each month

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you  
o Lord, my rock and my redeemer – Psalm 19:14*

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## Making it real

### As an individual

What has God revealed to you in terms of areas where your attitudes, behavior, or words have stirred frustration, hurt, or anger in your spouse?

What do you need to ask forgiveness for from God or your spouse?

What is God leading you to do or change this year as a spouse? What is your commitment to God and your spouse?

## As a Couple

What changes in your relationship are you committing to make as a couple this coming year?

Make a commitment together and write it down as to when you are going to meet on a regular basis to communicate together, plan together, evaluate together, and grow together.

## Scope Individual and Couple time

**This is a great exercise for your first time getting together.**

Question for each individual: As you look at your SCOPE, write down two or three tendencies that you see in yourself that could lead to (or have led to) difficulty in your relationship? Share with each other your observations. Pick one tendency each. Talk together about strategies or growth that could bring greater peace and joy to your relationship.