

Managing Marriage

Featuring

Highlights of John Gottman's 7 Principles for Marriage



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*Nate Richardson is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of
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& goodwill everywhere.*



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How to Communicate with Your Spouse

I've heard women say they want to be listened to, not given advice. While this can be accommodated to an extent, it's not fair to ask a man to just sit and listen to his wife's complaints and ask him to be restrained. Men love their wives. Thus it is in their nature to try and help them. So, just as wives need to be listened to, so do husbands need to be listened to. When a husband offers advice to his wife's problem, let her not say a thing like, "I didn't ask for advice, I just want you to listen!" That is rude of her to say. Let her rather say "I appreciate that you're thinking of a way to help me. I'm not sure that would be the best option. Allow me to tell you more about my situation." The husband learns to listen to his wife, but the wife also learns to listen to her husband. Husbands hate hearing wives in distress longing for help, so they offer help. The wives may not think that offer ideal. Similarly, wives hate to hear husbands speaking of their ideas of what to do, so they say they don't want to hear about those plans. The husbands may not think that suggestion ideal. So you see, both husbands and wives need space to speak in their own way, and to be heard. Men like to talk about action, women like to talk about feelings. Though there can be times when more emphasis is given to woman's speech, there must be other times when more emphasis is given to man's speech. Seldom should conversations be one sided. A conversation between a man and his wife can be difficult because of inherent differences in male and female speech preference, but they can learn to accommodate each other within a conversation. Women thirst for "being heard & acceptance", and men thirst for "collaboration & building". Let each spouse have in mind not only their own needs, but the needs of their other half, their spouse. Though male prefers one method of speech and female another, both have interest in both types. For the man to insist on his preferred speech all the time would be him using his wife as a door mat, and for the woman to insist on her preferred speech all the time would be her using him as a door mat.



Keeping a Latter-day Saint Marriage Alive: Q&A with a Friend

Topics:

1. Disclaimer: Limitations of and Suggested Sources for 3rd Party Marriage Advice
2. “My spouse wants to change me”
3. “My partner says I’m not giving my best effort since we got married”
4. “My partner complains that I’m a stay at home mom, says I don’t do anything”
5. “My spouse and I have been arguing a lot, serious side effects are arising”
6. “Some say I shouldn’t make such a big deal of our marriage issues”
7. “My spouse says my criticism of him and the opinion of my therapist are one sided and thus irrelevant”
8. Note: a few things to do regularly

Disclaimer: Limitations of and Suggested Sources for 3rd Party Marriage Advice

You're aware that when possible we keep marital issues inside the marriage, but you also understand that more serious/ongoing issues can necessitate a different approach.

Your councilor and bishop can go into more specifics and detailed plans for your marriage, I will keep things on a general basis.

Since I only know a little about your situation some of what I say can be irrelevant or offensive, so apologies in advance.

1. "My spouse wants to change me, is nagging et."

The wanting to change your spouse thing is tough, because we want to help each other be our best selves, but the issue is when we are impatient or proud about how we go about that. I'm sure there are things in your husband you'd like to change, just like there are things in you he would like to change. I've heard some speak of accepting their partner as they are; there is much of that which needs to go on, but a high expression of love is seeking someone's growth. But this must be done in the Lord's way and time.

2. "My partner says I'm not giving my best effort since we got married"

As for a complaint of not giving full effort since marriage, we often have ideas pre-marriage which don't reflect reality post marriage. It's natural to want 'Zion' to come faster than its coming, but we have much to learn about what 'Zion'/ideal really is, and how to get there. It's like the ancient missionary question 'why doesn't God just send angels to preach and baptize everyone?' The answer being baptizing is only half the goal, the other half is teaching missionaries how to work with people. Having the weekly family meeting will help spousal complaints be regular and from both sides rather than occasional blowups from one side or the other.

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3. “My partner complains that I’m a stay at home mom, says I don’t do anything”

As for being a stay at home mom, my wife is too. I think that is a very special arrangement. I think a core issue here is that we must avoid comparing ourselves to others. It’s also quite popular to have both spouses contribute to the family income; That may or may not be the right thing for your family. I for one believe housekeeping and childrearing is more than a full-time job. Different families have different systems of who does what, it seems the best is to let whoever is most interested/skilled in a thing oversee that thing, be it shopping, cooking, budgeting etc., though both should be sensitive to each other’s needs and wants.

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4. “My spouse and I have been arguing a lot, serious side effects are arising”

– Something that me and everyone else needs is marriage education. I’ve been married about 5 years, studied family life in college, and still it’s hard for me often to work on my marriage. Point being, it’s hard for any man to deal with emotional/marital issues. You can suggest to your husband in a polite but important way that you want to do regular marriage education studies with him, be that in an informal (the YouTube videos, or reading marriage books together) or if he is willing, seeing a bishop together (can see him alone too, but seeing him together is genius) or a therapist together. Your husband holds religion as a high priority so try and get an LDS therapist. My wife and I worked with a great lady at the BYU therapy place named Lauren Barnes her contact info is 247 TLRB (801) 422-3889 lauren_barnes@byu.edu. Your bishop will likely have other local resources for therapists. Men often resist therapy so you may have to be creative (and patient).

-One of my favorite therapists is Dr. John Gottman. He has lots of YouTube videos which make for good FHE and date night material. Short clips that help start conversations etc. Gottman is

famous for his '4 horsemen of the apocalypse' (defensiveness, contempt, stonewalling, criticism) which he says if remain present in a relationship will, like the apocalyptic horsemen, bring destruction to a marriage. Gottman gives examples of these. I.e. Defensiveness is when you tell someone an issue and they throw it back at you rather than taking accountability for it. Stonewalling would be like refusing to go to couples counseling. Criticism would be like focusing on the lacking aspects of one's spouse.

5. "Some say I shouldn't make such a big deal of our marriage issues"

-This brings up another thing I wanted to mention: when people are dismissive about your marriage problems, saying it's just a phase, give it time, etc., beware that council. Divorce is a real thing and happens to amazing people like your husband and yourself who find themselves in difficult, even if only temporarily difficult, circumstances. Marriages need lots of maintaining, its particularly hard for men to understand that. If your husband is anything like me, he will think he is doing a great job, and learn that he needs to do even more to meet the high bar marriage sets for men to rise to. I think men underestimate how difficult managing a marriage can be, I know I do. Getting your spouse to be committed to relationship education and maintenance is perhaps the biggest hurdle. This doesn't mean be doom and gloom, it means follow your promptings about issues that need addressing. You can do this while heeding the council of your therapist to 'not let things bother you so much'.

-I recently discovered FB groups, there's one called LDS healthy sexuality for women where women can bring up hard marriage questions in a private group. There are others but that's one I know of specifically for women. I'll bet they're willing to talk about more than just sexuality since everything plays into sexuality. There's probably some called 'LDS mothers' or 'LDS marriage' which may be a better fit for you. I like LDS groups

because they have a unique understanding of the standards and ideas we face as LDS people. There are some FB groups like these for men.

6. “My spouse says my criticism of him and the opinion of my therapist is one sided and thus irrelevant”

-The idea about a ‘paradigm shift’ being irrelevant because its only your perspective; That’s where couples therapy is so key: getting him to go with you to see bishop & therapist. It’s important that you both feel like your voice is being heard! Only then can you build solutions together. To me, this is sort of impossible if only 1 of you is getting therapy. Some people don’t trust therapists but trust bishops, you may need to start there and get to couples therapy a little later. If that’s the situation, it would help if a bishop could suggest to you together that you have marriage counseling. Often the church will even pay for it. I was a finance clerk I know. If you’ve hit a wall and he won’t talk to bishop with you, let him know how serious this is – the suicidality, the thoughts of running, etc. Tell him you love him but that you need help, and that to get that help he needs to be present for the therapy/bishop meetings at least some of the time. (The school of psychology and the school of family studies sort of split on this idea: the need for individual therapy vs the need for therapy with family members involved, that’s why I studied family studies instead of psychology, my strong belief in couple’s therapy.) Seeing a bishop together for a while may be sufficient and you won’t need to see a professional therapist together. Bishops are a good place to start. Bishops can discern council for you, often that council is to get professional counseling. Again, most guys resist the idea of counseling; ya’ll may not need it but with the symptoms you described, I’d say better safe than sorry, and it can only help. There is no shame in getting couples therapy, only shame in avoiding marital problems. And don’t be ashamed of your symptoms. I’m not saying I know what ya’ll should do, I’m just saying that therapy is in my experience 95% of the time helpful for these important

situations/road blocks. Ya'll may do a few months and sort things out and be good to go, ya'll may need to do couples therapy for a long-term basis – either way, it's worth it if it means saving a marriage or making a good marriage into a great marriage. You may be able to sort things out without therapy, but one thing is certain: some sorting out needs to happen, and it's probably not going to happen overnight.

7. Note: a few things to do regularly:

-A few housekeeping items: Make sure you're doing these specific things the prophets have suggested for family success: 1. Couple prayer 2. Couple scripture study 3. Family meeting (for planning, budgeting, bringing up issues, giving compliments, etc.) 4. Weekly date night 5. Monthly temple. These aren't the end solution, but they're important to move things forward. (*Not the endgame, but gamechangers)

The 7 Principles of Successful Marriage by John Gottman, PhD – Book Highlights & Commentary



Hear the full book here <https://youtu.be/UyuhOSTvCCO>

The following notes are in my own words and do not completely represent the ideas and intended message of the author. Various principles I found meaningful are shared here with added commentary. Be sure to use the full text for more great ideas.

I enjoy Gottman's series of questions, they remind me of the questions in Alma 5 to gauge whether one's soul is alive, but here they gauge whether one's marriage is alive. The teachings in this book for marriage are also very helpful for parenting where applicable.

Introductory Messages:

After listening to a couple interact for as little as 5 minutes he can predict with 91% accuracy which marriages will succeed and which will end in divorce.

Within 4 years of marriage **67%** of them will end in divorce. Most divorces **happen within the first 7 years** of marriage. People who have divorced once are 10% more likely to divorce again.

People take marriage for advantage, they don't realize it takes nourishment to live.

Therapists go based on their own experience and values, they don't give council based on scientific data.

Emotional intelligence is now being recognized as a major factor in predicting a child's future success.

An unhappy marriage can increase your chances of getting sick by 35% and shorten your life by an average of 4 years. But happily married people are healthier and live longer than people who are divorced or who have unhappy marriage.



Happily married people have stronger immune systems.
If bodybuilders would spend 10 minutes of their workout time each day working on their marriage instead of their bodies it would give them much more health advantages.

Children from homes with bad marriages and high stress were followed over the years and were found to measure more negatively in various areas - they were more aggressive, they did worse in school, had a harder time with getting along with peers, etc.

Divorced parents continue to fight, so children of those marriages are often no better off after the divorce than they were before it.

Therapists focus on telling people to use good communication skills like active listening, but this doesn't work .

Even if you're making "I statements" about how what the other person is doing, the other person still knows those are indirect attacks on you and they won't take it well. For some people communication skills helps but for most it doesn't. It only helps 35% and a year later it's half of that.

Happily married people can have loud arguments without their marriage being hurt.

It's **false that personality problems ruin** marriages.

The key to marriage is not having a normal personality, it's finding someone with whom you mesh.

A person who doesn't like authority and doesn't like working with bosses should not marry someone who is bossy and gives commands. This person will be able to have a happy marriage with someone who treats him like a partner.

(Note: It helps if you mesh, but even people with differing personalities can learn to make a marriage work well.)

It's false that common interests will keep a marriage together.

Happily married people don't keep score about what the one does for the other, to calculate what they need to do, they just spontaneously out of love do things for the other.

Happily married people do **little things to accommodate** their spouse because they know their spouse has that preference.

It's false to say that a couple needs to hash out every problem to have a happy marriage. The reality is that when you're upset with your spouse, walking away from the situation or brushing it under the rug can be a good thing. They can then later they can come back together like nothing happened, and that actually does work when a marriage is strong.

There are different styles of resolving conflict in a marriage; you can use whatever style works for both people. Some people like to talk out conflicts, other people like to close it off and forget about it, some like to negotiate, etc.

Getting people to disagree in a nicer way does reduce stress levels, but it's not enough to pump life into a dying marriage. Happily married people have just as many arguments as

unhappily married people. The difference is the happily married people know how to get through it. Friendly married people understand that when one of them is on edge it's not to be taken as a personal attack, it's just that something is bothering them.



It's false that affairs are the most common thing that leads to divorce. Affairs are more of a symptom of a failing marriage than a cause of it. Usually **affairs are less about intercourse and more about friendship**, caring, & affection. Most married couples break up because of a lack of affection. **For both men and women the quality of romance & intercourse is based on friendship.**

Now that so many women work out of the home the number of marital affairs by women has skyrocketed. Women now have more affairs than men.

His marriage workshop relapse rate is 20% while most of the nation's percentage is 30 to 50.

Friendship (meaning mutual respect and enjoyment of company) is what happy marriages are built on. They know each other

well, they know each other's hopes and dreams.

A fragile marriage will have a hard time with someone who has a long work schedule, but a strong marriage finds ways to get around that (like calling each other at different times of the day to see how things are going).

Your body has a set weight that it will usually stay at, so dieting doesn't really work unless you also exercise to help the metabolism (note – that's mostly true, but a really good diet will work regardless, though fitness obviously helps.). Marriage is similar with the amount of positivity and negativity, meaning for positive marriages it takes a whole lot of negative to really bring it down. A little negative here and there won't bring it down. For marriages which are very negative, just a little positive thing here and there won't turn it into a positive marriage, it needs some overhauling.

Superficial conflicts are driven by bigger issues underneath.

When marriages are based on friendships it **doesn't mean there will be no arguing**, it means they **won't let the arguing get out of hand**.

Repair attempts are a secret weapon of emotionally intelligent couples to keep arguments from escalating out of control.

Almost everyone messes up during marital conflict, what matters is that the repair is successful.

A surprising truth is that **most marital conflicts cannot be resolved** (we just learn to deal with them in manageable ways). All married people will admit that their marriage is not perfect.

As divorce gets near people live together but are like ghosts haunting a marriage that used to exist and they have no interest in each other's lives.

Criticism contempt defensiveness and stonewalling these are the four horsemen of the Apocalypse of marriage and they enter marriage in that order.

Criticism: You'll always have complaints about people you live with but there's a **difference between complaints and criticism**. Criticism tacks on negative attributes of a person's personality to the complaint. Complaints are about a specific thing, but criticism attacks someone's character.

Contempt is hostility, name calling, etc. Contempt conveys disgust and it is the **worst of the four** horsemen. Contempt is **when criticisms become global** like saying you **always** do such and such. Belligerence is similar to contempt: it is aggressive anger with a threat.

Defensiveness is blaming your partner for your problems. When you are defensive you ignore repair attempts from your spouse and you refuse to let them win.

Stonewalling is when one partner eventually tunes out. This is more common among men. Instead of facing the marriage, the person walks out when there's a problem. The stonewaller gives no feedback when the spouse is speaking. Stonewalling happens after negativity from the first three horsemen become negative enough and heavy enough to where the person wants out. When a spouse floods you with criticism or contempt, all you can think about is protecting yourself from the turbulence the spouse will cause and the way to do that is to disengage emotionally from a relationship.

Habitual harshness and flooding leads to stonewalling, then comes divorce.

Flooding is more common among women and stonewalling more common among men, but either the man or the woman, whoever

floods, the other will respond by stonewalling eventually.

Gottman measures the biological responses of people while they're talking to each other. Blood pressure, heart rate, sweating, etc.

When you have all of these signs of stress you have an innate feeling of fear.



Note - as is common, Gottman like other scientists today tows the line of “we were once cavemen and we still have some of that” and related nonsense. This is not a necessary line of thought - just because we get afraid etc. does not mean we used to be cavemen.

The amount of milk a woman produces is caused by the amount of relaxation oxytocin they experience.

Men are more prone to become anxious and upset when marital problems are brought up, they have this reaction in general; for example, if a loud noise happens, men will be more startled and have a higher blood pressure for longer than women.

You can listen to a newlywed couple have an argument and see

how they do it and predict the rate of success of their marriage.

Note - of course well-meaning people can learn new skills etc. to change old habits and methods of dealing with things and change their success percentage predictions. More accurately, and I'm sure Gottman would agree, would be to say that by measuring such a conversation, the success rate can be calculated that if they DON'T change their ways, their end is near with the present broken methods.

The presence of the four horsemen in a marriage make it an 80% divorce probability, but when you add in failed repair attempts (repair attempts being ignored), the probability goes up to 90%. 84% of marriages where the four horsemen were present but they repaired successfully were still married happily together 6 years later.

Even telling someone to stop yelling at you can be a successful repair attempt.

The repair attempts do not have to be fancy or perfect, they will work if the marriage is in a good state.

When the four horsemen are there to stay in a marriage, no matter how good the repair attempt is, it gets rejected. There are actually more repair attempts in bad marriages than good marriages because in the bad marriages they keep trying and trying to no avail.

The quality of the **friendship in the marriage is what determines whether repair attempts will work.**

In a strong marriage they view the history of their marriage as positive and they see the good that came out of it even in the hard times; but in a weak marriage they see the negative in everything about their marriage, they rewrite history to emphasize all the negative and exaggerate the negative.

Note - we see this really well in the Book of Mormon with the

Nephites and the Lamanites, where the Lamanites are always complaining about how the Nephites “wronged them”. The Lamanites had learned to blame all their problems on the Nephites, and cultured contempt (hostility) toward them.

Marriages with aren't doing well when the people can't remember the good times, they can't remember the positives that led them to get married in the first place, etc.

Note - this is why it's important to review photo albums, etc.

In a happy marriage a sign of affection is just, that but in an unhappy marriage a sign of affection is interpreted as ‘the other person must want something from me’.

When the history gets rewritten in a negative way, the marriage is about to fail.

Note - This also tells us a lot about the progressive rewriting of church history and the progressive rewriting of American history - these institutions are being attacked in a very effective way. Enemies get people to see things as inherently negative, and the people abolish the institutions on their own.

Some people leave a marriage literally by divorcing, others leave a marriage by checking out emotionally. Inexperienced therapists can see a couple and often not tell that one of them is already checked out of the marriage, even though the couple is not constantly arguing etc.

Steps toward breakup:

- 1 you see your marital problems as severe
- 2 you try to solve problems on your own
- 3 loneliness ensues
- 4 you start living separate lives

A harsh startup to a discussion is a sign the marriage is in very bad shape.

Gottman Marriage Principle 1: Sharing Love Maps

A marriage which is about to hit rock bottom can often be revived if the proper help is applied. Bad advice from a therapist to just negotiate your differences and improve your communication won't suffice. It's not just about teaching people how to argue. **The key is not in what you do when you're having argument, it's what you do when you're not having an argument.** That's how you generally get along. The key is to strengthen the friendship at the heart of the marriage.

Emotionally intelligent couples are intimately aware of each other's world. In other words, there is a richly detailed love map where you store information about your partner's life. If you don't really know someone how can you truly love them? It's telling that the biblical term for sexual love is "to know".

67% of young couples after having their first baby experienced a decrease in marital satisfaction. But for many of the rest of them their marriage improved, and that is because they had detailed love maps all along.

When you become a parent it's such a significant change that your whole sense of who you are is changed.

But if you're in the habit of staying up to date with your spouse you'll learn who this new person is as they develop you won't just be surprised by a new person that you're not connected to.

Having a baby is just one major life event that can cause couples who don't have a detailed love map to separate. Any major life-changing event can cause the separation.

No matter how busy, married people should daily check in on how their spouse is doing, and once a week they should go out to dinner and talk about whatever.

Note: It's similar for children. Keep checking in and have a weekly family night.

Even if a couple does not know each other for very long before they get married they can still have detailed love maps and deep intimacy by knowing who the other person well, not just their hobbies but their hopes dreams fears etc.

Note – Ayn Rand said that people with honest intentions don't need great introductions, they aren't hiding things, you can get to know them quickly. This is right, and is why some couples meet and date for only a short period of time before creating a lifelong happy marriage.

Some ways to develop the love map:

Can you name your partner's best friends?

Can you say what stresses your partner is currently facing?

Do you know the names of some of the people who have been irritating your partner lately?

Do you know some of your partner's life dreams?

Are you very familiar with your partners religious beliefs and ideas?

Can you explain your partner's basic philosophy about life?

Can you list the relatives your partner likes the least?

Do you know your partner's favorite music?

Can you list your partners three favorite movies?

Is your spouse familiar with your current stresses?

Do you know the three most special times in your partner's life?
Do you know the most stressful thing that happens to your partner as a child?
Can you list your partner's major aspirations and hopes in life?
Do you know your partner's major current horrors?
Does your spouse know who your friends are?
Do you know what your partner would want to do if they suddenly came on a large amount of money?
Can you explain in detail your first impressions of your partner?
Do you periodically ask your partner about their world right now?
Do you feel that your partner knows you pretty well?
Is your spouse familiar with your hopes and aspirations?

When you know each other well you'll be able to handle problems that will arise in your marriage.
Take the time to get to know more about your spouse because people's lives change so you **need to update** the love map.
Getting to know each other should not be a chore, it could be one of the greatest joys.

Play a game that helps you get to know each other better. Could have pre-written questions and points for having them answered.

Can you describe in detail what your partner did today or yesterday?
What is your spouse's favorite way to spend an evening?
What was one of your spouse's best childhood experiences?
What is your spouse's preferred method of soothing?
What are some important events coming up in your spouse's life and how do they feel about them?
Know what your spouse is most sad about and what medical problems ail them?
Who are two people your spouse looks up to and someone who is their rival?

Do you know your spouse's social security number?

Make love maps right down the basics. The point is to listen and learn about your spouse not to give advice during these type of exercises. The love map should be long and deep. Even if you think you are an open book there's always more to learn.

Don't take advantage of knowing about your spouse's life, keep that information updated. It is an ongoing and lifelong process to get to know your spouse. Feeling known and understood is one of the greatest gifts you can give to someone.

Write a mission statement for your own life, your interests hopes etc., goals for the long term.

Who you want to become

What you have already faced.

What you have failed to develop.

Who you want to be in 5 years.

Write your own tombstone & obituary



Gottman Marriage Principle 2: Nurture Your Fondness & Admiration

If there's some glimmer of a fondness and admiration, there is hope to save a marriage.

Recount your courtship. By looking at the past you can often come up with embers of positive feeling.

If married people do not feel respect for each other, the marriage is doomed.

Ask:

Can you easily list the things you admire most about your partner?

Do you often find ways to tell your partner you love them?

Do you often touch or kiss your partner affectionately?

Does your partner really respect you?

Do you feel loved and cared for in this relationship?

Do you feel accepted and liked by your partner?

Do you feel that your partner is attracted to you?

Do you feel fire and passion in the relationship?

Do you feel romance is definitely still part of the relationship?

Are you really proud of your partner?

Does your partner really enjoy your achievements and accomplishments?

Can you easily tell why you married your spouse?

If you had to do it all over again would you marry the same person?

Do you rarely go to sleep without some show of love and affection?

When you come into a room is your partner glad to see you?

Does your partner appreciate the things you do in the marriage?

Does your spouse generally like your personality?

Is your intimate life generally satisfying?

The simple act of discussing the positive things about the history of your marriage generates tremendous power as you solve problems in your marriage.

Ask:

What was it that initially attracted you to your spouse?

How long did you know each other before marriage what do you remember about the highlights of this period and some of the tensions?

What made you decide to marry this person as opposed to anyone else in the world?

What do you remember about your marriage wedding and your honeymoon and the first year of marriage?

What was it like making the decision to become parents?

Many relationships go through periods of ups and downs, is this how you describe your marriage talk about those periods?

How and why have you gone through the difficult times of your marriage?

What fun things have you stopped doing?

Talk about each other's philosophy of marriage of what makes a marriage work and what doesn't; talk about people you know who have a good and bad marriages, what makes them different, and how you would compare this to your marriage.

Talk about your parents' marriage and how it's different or similar to yours.

Make a chart of your marriage the major turning points, ups and downs, find the happiest parts for you and your partner.

Train your thoughts to think about the positive of your spouse.

Think of one belief you share.

Think of one common goal you share.

Think of the time when your spouse was very supportive of you.

Think of your spouse as your best friend.

Think of a specific time when you have felt proud of your family.

Think of a difficult thing you've overcome together.

Ask your spouse about something that interests you.

Write a love letter to your spouse and mail it.

Plan an elegant evening or vacation.



Gottman Marriage Principle 3: Turning Toward Each Other Instead of Away

When couples engage in casual chit chat it is a predictor of marital success. They are little moments of connection, of turning toward each other.

Unlike the movies dramatic scenes, real marriage and romance is strengthened by little connections.

When your spouse says something don't ignore it, act positively on what they say.

When you don't have time to discuss something tell your spouse

to give you the short version of the account now and that you can discuss it later rather than just saying you don't have time.

Do couples read the news together or read it alone?

Do couples chat during a meal or do something to themselves?

Couples need to store up good will so that in times of crisis they have that to draw upon to keep a positive sense of their marriage.

Even a big event vacation won't help the marriage come alive if it's already dead, you have to keep it alive by doing little things each day, then at that point the big event can fan the fire higher.

Do you enjoy doing small things together?

Do you look forward to spending your free time with your partner?

At the end of the day is your partner glad to see you?

Is your partner usually interested in hearing your views?

Do you really enjoy discussing things with your partner?

Is your partner one of your best friends?

Do you think your partner would consider you a very close friend?

Do you just love talking to your spouse?

When you go out together does the time go by very quickly?

Do you always have a lot to say to each other?

Do you have a lot of fun together?

Are you spiritually very compatible?

Do you tend to share the same basic values?

Do you like to spend time together in similar ways?

Do you have a lot of common interests, dreams and goals?

Even though your interests are somewhat different, do you enjoy your partner's interests?

Whatever you do together do you usually tend to have a good time?

Does your partner tell you when they have had a bad day?

Little connections throughout the day are the heart and soul of a marriage. The first step in turning toward each other is to be aware of how crucial these little things are.

It may help to write a contract of a specific action you'll do like "I John will walk the dog with Mary 3x a week."

It may help to track the times you do well and poorly in marriage in a given day, giving and taking points.

No matter how good your communication techniques are it's hard to not feel extremely angry when your spouse is just laying on one after another criticism and complaint. But it does help to use good communication techniques when you're talking about good things.

Unsolicited advice is likely not going to go well in a marriage. They have to know you understand and empathize before you suggest a solution.

Usually women react very negatively if men try to give advice right away after women tell them their troubles.

A man is much more tolerant of hearing solutions when he complains.

The role of a spouse is not to solve their spouse's problems but to offer support. It seems almost too good to be true that you earn points by not trying to solve your partner's problems, but so it is. Empathize with your partner. The point is not to be dishonest, it's about using good timing.

Never take the side of the enemy when your spouse is complaining about someone.

Friendship is about knowing someone is on your side.

Have you been feeling defensive hurt angry sad misunderstood criticized worried unappreciated righteously indignant unattractive disgusted disapproving like leaving like your

opinions didn't matter like you had no idea what you were feeling or lonely?

What triggered these feelings? Did you feel excluded unimportant to your spouse cold towards your spouse , feeling no affection towards your partner, feeling your partner is not attracted to you, that your sense of dignity was being compromised, that your partner was being domineering, that you cannot persuade your partner at all?

Are these feelings related to your past experiences? Do these feelings about your experience and your marriage come from the way you were raised, past injuries tough times or traumas you've suffered, your basic insecurities, things you have not yet resolved, unrealized hopes you have, ways people have treated you in the past, things you've always thought about yourself, old nightmares or catastrophes you worry about, and other subjective matters?

Distance and loneliness are nobody's fault.

Have you been very stressed and irritable, have you failed to express appreciation and affection to your spouse, have you been overly sensitive, have you been overly critical, have you failed to share about your inner world, do you feel you have a chip on your shoulder, have you not been very affectionate, have you not been a very good listener, have you been feeling like a martyr?

Friendship helps to balance the power between husband and wife. Friends can appreciate each other's point of view even when they don't agree.



Gottman Marriage Principal 4: Letting Your Partner Influence You

When a man is not willing to share power with his wife there's an 81% chance of divorce.

Data shows that sharing power in a marriage is mostly a male issue but there are some women also who have a problem with sharing power.

This does not mean men should give up all their personal power and let their wives rule their lives.

Usually women do not increase the negativity in a discussion, they try to lower it or they match the husband's negativity level. But 65% of the men's responses escalated the negativity.

If a man responds to his wife using one of the four horsemen it's a sign he is not willing to take advice from his wife.

Studies show that if your discussion begins on a harsh note it will end poorly even if there are repair attempts in between. You can predict the result of a 15-minute conversation within the first 3 minutes with almost complete accuracy; if you have a harsh start-up to a conversation you may as well pull the plug on that conversation.

You can turn any complaint into a criticism by the magic phrase "what is wrong with you?"

Women are much better at friendship than men, men have much to learn from them on this regard. Women naturally are friendly and like to discuss feelings, events etc. From a young age girls games involve relationships and boys games do not.

Before age 7 boys and girls are friends and between age 7 and puberty there's virtually 0% of friendships between boys and girls. In very young children, as in under the age of five, girls will be influenced by boys or girls, but the boys will only be influenced by other boys. By the time kids reach age 5 or 7 the girls are fed up with this and don't want to play with the boys anymore. This is a worldwide phenomenon.

Men have to be more intentional about becoming emotionally intelligent than women.

Men must learn to honor their wives and respect their wives. They must change their definition of success to also include family life, not just career. He must have a map of his wife's life, must have affection for her and must turn toward her throughout his day to show that affection.

Research shows that a man who can accept influence from his wife also makes a good father and is aware of his children's worlds. He is not afraid of emotions and teaches his children to respect their feelings. He turns off the TV and wants his children to remember him as having had time for them.

When a man is connected to his wife she will come to him not just when she is in trouble but when she is delighted.

Those who are unwilling to accept influence will be minimally

influential themselves. Men must beware falling into the trap of thinking that women cannot influence them.

Sharing marital power is a relatively new concept from the past few decades. Men who are willing to accept influence from their wives are happily married and those who are not accepting influence are usually divorced .

There are no female dominant societies but there are some egalitarian.

There has been a shift in attitude about fathers. They help care for infants more now, they'll feed them a bottle, change a diaper, push the baby in a stroller, they will help with more chores around the house and sometimes the woman helps provide financially. There is less need for the man to defend since we have enforced laws in society and there is less hunting going on which has always been a man's job.

The 'female' aspects of God as in love, compassion, mercy, these aspects are being more widely recognized by society.

There is now a men's rights movement. This is evidence that there is certainly a change taking place.

Note - Warren Farrell in the men's rights movement does have some very interesting things to say.

When there's a big problem you can try to crash right into it or you can try to drive around it because you have to.

In arguments one must be willing to compromise, make rearrangements, etc.

The home belongs to the woman not just the man, so the man should not make all the decisions about it by himself.

Are you interested in your spouse's opinions?

Do you learn from your spouse?

Do you want what your partner says to feel like their opinion matters to you?

Do you want your spouse to feel influential in your marriage?

To what point can you listen to your spouse?

Do you believe your spouse has a lot of basic common sense?

Do you try to communicate with respect even during disagreements?

Are you trying to continually convince and win over your partner?

Do you reject your partner's advice just because it's from your partner?

Do you take your partner seriously when you discuss issues?

Do you believe there should be give and take in your discussions?

Do you feel like you need to be the winner in discussions with your spouse?

Do you feel that your partner usually has good ideas?

Do you feel your partner is a great help as a problem solver?

Do you try to listen respectfully even when you disagree?

Can you usually find something to agree with in your partner's decisions?

Do you feel your partner is usually too emotional?

Do you feel that you are the one who needs to make a major decisions in the marriage?

Yield to win. Sometimes you have to let go of some things you want in order to get other things you really want.

The goal in marriage is for both partners to be influential. When your spouse expresses that something is out of balance or needs to be done differently, take that seriously into account and talk about how that problem can be solved in a way that works for both of you.

Play a survival game where you have to choose which items you

bring with you from a long list with a limited number you can bring and see how effective you are at influencing your spouse and how effective your spouse is at influencing you. In the game you are working as a team. Were you dominating? Did you both have fun? Did you feel irritable, did you feel included?

When there's a problem in your marriage the best thing you can do is talk about it, it'll take time to fix.

Ask your partner for what they feel like you could work on in the marriage.

There are two types of marital disagreements, ones that can be resolved and ones that will be perpetual. 69% are perpetual. Despite what many therapists will tell you, you don't have to resolve your major conflicts to have a happy marriage. You just have to find ways to get along notwithstanding. Problems are inevitably a part of a relationship just like how physical ailments are a part of growing old.

Note - Gottman is pretty soft about religious differences etc., and encourages people to simply find ways around them. I would say however that there are some things where couples shouldn't compromise. Gottman surely understands this, but it appears his line is drawn quite far back.

See book *After the Honeymoon: How Conflict Can Improve Your Relationship-Revised Edition* Paperback – September 24, 2008 by Daniel B. Wile



Gottman Marriage Principal 5: Solving Your Solvable Problems

Solvable problems can be solved but they haven't been yet. It's more than just validating advice you hear.

Here's a summary of the tips for solvable problems:

1. Ensure your startup is soft rather than harsh.
2. Use repair attempts effectively.
3. Monitor your physiology during intense discussions for signs of flooding.
4. Learn how to compromise.
5. Become more tolerant of each other's imperfections.

If you don't work on solvable problems they can evolve into perpetual problems.

Emotional style is part of one's personality and is unlikely to change.

So learn to tolerate each other's emotional style.

Note - True to some extent but remember people can change.

The symbol of money and how a person perceives it is usually rooted in childhood experiences.

Categorize your marital problems as solvable, unsolvable or as 'not a problem right now'.

Are you talking about issues in your marriage, do you have romance and fire in your marriage, do stresses in your life spill over into family relationships, are your differences leading to separation and irritability, do you differ in how to deal with children and how to be close to children, is there a lack of trust, are you sharing the weight of family duties, is your spouse being considerate and sharing in power and influence, are you united in managing and planning your finances, are you feeling close about spiritual issues, do you agree about religious values?

It's impossible to accept advice from someone unless you feel that person understands you, so before you ask someone to change you need to make sure they feel you understand them.

Studies in child development show that children grow optimally when we acknowledge their emotions. Don't belittle them or punish them for their feelings, rather talk to them about how they feel. When you acknowledge that emotions are okay you're also sending the message that that person is okay and accepted which allows them to grow.

In all arguments no one is ever absolutely right.

Note - that's probably true a lot of the time, but I take a little less of a relativistic approach than Gottman. For example: when a prophet is duking it out with an antichrist, the prophet is right and the antichrist is wrong. Like President Monson said, you're never in the wrong when you're doing what's right, and you're never in the right when you're doing what's wrong. Something like that. Sometimes people are simply wrong. Gottman's point is likely that in marriage, both parties need to be sensitive to each other's views, and open to the possibility that you could

learn something from your spouse. Of course there are cases where one spouse argues against doing something you know is right, and people need to be brave enough to stand their ground in these cases even in marriage. Elsewhere Gottman and others like Jordan Peterson point out that its better to duke it out than to live year after year being upset by your partner. But remember the need for temperance humility and self control. Brigham Young taught that its not good to just let your anger out, that you should be quiet in these cases, that some self-suppression is right and good.

When you argue with your spouse do you feel hurt angry defensive sad misunderstood criticized indignant unappreciated unattractive disapproving like leaving like your opinions didn't matter like you had no idea what you're feeling lonely.

What triggered these feelings, was it that you felt excluded, that you felt not important to your spouse, that you felt cold towards your spouse, that you felt rejected, that you were criticized, that you felt no affection towards your partner, that you felt that your partner was not attracted to you, that your sense of dignity was being compromised, or that your partner was being domineering, or that you could not persuade your partner at all?

See if you can find connections between earlier traumas in your life and the current situation.

Note - this can help you understand what's going on, it's not to say 'dwell on past trauma.'

We are all complicated creatures whose actions and reactions are governed by a wide array of complexities.
This makes reality subjective where neither partner may be right.

Note - there is some truth to this but of course there's also

objective reality which we try to be in tune with.

Both need to be admitting that they had a role in creating the conflict.

Consider your partner's imperfections as amusement rather than frustration, this is a secret of long happy marriages. Yes there is hurt and hardship but there's also fondness and respect for the complete package of who your partner is.

Shakespeare wrote In The merchant of Venice that mercy is twice blessed, blessing the giver and the receiver, and so it is in marriage - when you forgive it helps you both.

We all have communication and relationship skills but we get out of habit of using them with those that are closest to us. Treat your spouse and family as you would guests in your home.

The wife is more likely to bring up a touchy subject and push to get it resolved than the husband. Therefore the wife is usually the one who will do the harsh startup of an argument.

60% of divorces are not from major events but from little things over time leading to lack of connectedness.

Note - great point. Most divorces aren't because you "chose the wrong person", but because you failed to maintain the marriage.

You can tell there is harsh startup when in an argument someone feels picked on and the argument comes out of nowhere and escalates quickly and involves criticizing and harmful words.

If you can't have a calm argument, wait until you can.

The Bible says don't let the sun go down on your wrath.

Repair attempts are putting on the brakes. When you learn how to drive a car the first thing to learn is how to hit the brakes. Repair attempts are things that deescalate situations. Repair attempts often go unnoticed because they are often not sugar coated.

Sometimes learning to do something the right way feels awkward and unnatural but once you get that skill down it becomes natural.

You can make an obvious repair attempt like saying ‘clip clop’ whenever you see one of the four horsemen has come into an argument.

It is harder for a man's body to calm down after an argument then for a woman.

Soothing each other regularly is a good way to prevent future flooding.

When flooded people tend to hold their breath so breathe.

The keystone of effective compromise in marriage is accepting influence from your spouse; this doesn't mean you have to agree with everything, but you have to openly and honestly consider their position.

To be able to compromise successfully you can't think about your spouse in an “if only if such and such were different about them” way, you have to accept them.

Marriage takes work, this means there are a series of emotional tasks you have to go through together.

Today's couples work an average of 1,000 more hours per year than couples did 30 years ago. This means less time for talking, relaxing etc. Bringing home work stress is very bad for marriage.

Often when people come home from work they need a little time to unwind from the stress of work. If your spouse just grumbles after work, ask them what the matter is don't take it personally. You might have a little session where each partner gets to complain about their day while the other listens.

In-laws:

It's more common for there to be issues between a wife and mother in law than a husband and mother in law.

The only way to end such a conflict is for the husband to side with his wife. He is a husband first then a son.

Don't ever complain about your spouse to your parent.

Always stand up for your spouse as who knows best for your kids.

If your spouse sees you as siding with your mother against her about something, that is something you need to work on, even if you don't agree with your spouse.

Note - there is wisdom from the ancients, and hopefully both partners can respect that. But having the family unit be united and strong is of utmost importance. Some views take time to form.

Finance:

See book "Get a Financial Life: Personal Finance in Your Twenties and Thirties" by Beth Kobliner

Budget.

Maybe have a joint account and two separate accounts for recreation if you can't agree on that.

Intimacy:

For marital intimacy, if you never ask for what you want you're unlikely to get it.

View issues in this area as making a great thing even better, see the positive in what you have.

It's a very vulnerable area, people are understandingly hesitant to discuss it.

You might take turns accommodating ones preferences.

A chef isn't upset if a customer doesn't want a certain dish, he just accommodates their wishes. Similar idea. (Involves service element).

Sharing ones fantasies helps, and if it's not something that makes you feel uncomfortable you may as well indulge your partner. Don't judge your partner for their fantasies.

Initiating these things can be a chore which if one person always does you may want to share that duty better.

Intimacy can vary but at least sometimes must be an expression of love.

Book "The joy of sex"

Book "The new male sexuality"

Note - I've not reviewed those books and cannot vouch for them.

I think sometimes authors and advocates for this topic take things too far, focus on this too much, etc.

Chores:

Men often don't realize how much women care about keeping their home clean. When a man doesn't do his share of the housework the woman resents him and feels unsupported. Many men today were raised in traditional homes where men didn't know housework at all.

Most men overestimate how much housework they do. When men complain that they are doing all the housework it usually means they are doing half.

Women find men's willingness to do housework attractive. In marriages where the man does his share of chores there's higher reporting of marital intimacy satisfaction.

A husband who helps with the housework without being asked or nagged earns lots of emotional points in the marriage. And even better if he sees she's having a particularly hard time he volunteers to help extra.

When men do enough chores there is also less flooding and 'horseman' arguments.

It would be wise to itemize family chores and see who has which current assignments so that you can move forward on that. A man doesn't necessarily have to do half the chores, but couples must agree on a plan.

Often the wife gets more of the mindless daily drudge work of cleaning and the man gets more of the heavy lifting occasional tasks, the tasks which aren't as urgent.

Listing out family chores can range from indoor, outdoor, business, finance, child care, children emotion management, event planning, etc.

Parenthood Transition:

The thing that mainly determines whether a couple is happy after having a baby is whether or not the husband also transforms his life adjusting to the new world. The woman basically automatically always does transition. The Husband can't get his wife back the way she was before the baby came but he can follow her into this new realm and gain the pride of fatherhood.

A husband and wife who are making the transition into parenthood well don't look for ways to get away from the baby or to stop talking about the baby. They enjoy being with the baby and they enjoy talking about the baby. This is contrary to popular

advice in psychology that encourages people to treat marriage and family as two separate things to be balanced and to take turns with; on the contrary they should unite these two. It is good and right that a new family is born and less attention is given to just the couple's relationship.

Note - Great point here. The family is to work together, to be a force together, to have a mission together, to find new identity together, members are to lose themselves in order to find themselves. This is why family life is so central to Christian life, it shows you how to selflessly become one with others, and only then can you begin to become one with God, and this unity is the precise will of God (see John 17).

You've got to know each other very well before the baby comes - the more you are a team before the baby the easier the transition into family life will be.

Mothers must beware of telling fathers how to care for the baby because the baby is also the father's baby and the baby will benefit from experiencing multiple parenting styles. If the mother is always correcting the father about how to care for the baby he will help less and less.

Giving a little advice is fine but avoid lectures and criticism. If you feel there is a serious problem consult the doctor.

Countless studies have affirmed that women are more nurturing and men are more playful when it comes to children. But when husbands make an effort to play with an infant they'll find even a 3 week old baby can smile and be playful.

The wife's time will be mostly devoted to the baby and less to the husband. The wife can be sensitive to this and continue to express devotion to her husband.

Mother will need a break whenever possible with the newborn so father should try to come home from work as much as he can to help.



Gottman Marriage Principle 6: Overcoming Gridlock

Try to move from gridlock to dialogue.

Gridlock is often from unfulfilled dreams of peace & freedom, a spiritual journey, being one with nature, finding who you are, honor, unity with one's past, having more power exploring the creative side of yourself, becoming more competent, exploiting an old part of yourself, being productive, truly relaxing, getting priorities in order, winning competitions, building something important, etc.

Some dreams are tangible like getting a certain degree or job, others are less tangible like having a feeling of safety or feeling of adventure.

Hidden dreams can harm families. Be open. Helping each other realize their dreams is one of the goals of marriage. Gridlock

comes when spouses do not understand each other's goals and dreams.

The dream at the core of conflict is often not obvious. Don't try to solve the problem before you understand it or it will backfire.

Intellectual analysis of an emotional problem will not solve the issue. You may have a big problem when a couple has an argument with no emotion even if it is calm.

It's best when you can become a part of your partner's dreams, meaning helping them fulfill those dreams and doing it with them. But when you can't do this you can at least be supportive.

Note - some of this book promotes an idea of doing what you agree on, and ignores right and wrong, only emphasizing agreeing with your spouse. I don't think this is the intended message of the author, he does say you shouldn't go along with your spouse in something wrong, but beware and don't assume that agreement and peace are the highest good. Gottman emphasizes the importance of understanding each other and compromising together where possible in order to save marriages. This is a good message when understood in the context of truth and basic morality. Furthermore, some compromise I don't think is justified, and those who marry people of a different faith (or a very different philosophy) will always have big disagreements, so try to marry within your faith and philosophy. (If you don't know your faith or philosophy, that's a good place to start.)

Gottman Marriage Principle 7: Creating Shared Meaning Together

Marriage isn't about only about chores raising children and

intimacy even the happy marriages need more connection when there is still a longing for something else.

Note - this chapter is about the family mission, this is a big deal, and where much meaning and effectiveness comes in life. I recommend “A Christ Centered Home” by the Stoddards for an example of a family working together for God. See my notes on that elsewhere.

There must be spiritual family linking together.

The more you can agree about the fundamentals of life the richer your marriage will be.

If you are open to each other's perspectives it is likely that there will be some coming together on these deep issues.

Note - Also sometimes you have to plant seeds of truth and wait a while for them to grow. There's no such thing as a perfect person, you both will have problems you need to grow in. You can't delay marriage forever due to not finding a perfect match, you just try to find someone who is willing to work with you and who loves God. When genuine love for God exists, much of the specifics will come by and by as they (you) are introduced to them and have a little time to see the wisdom of it.

Generational family stories teaching important values are a big deal.

As you work on each of the seven principles of this book it becomes easier to work on the others.

Are family rituals and holidays happy times for your family,
are end of the day reunions in the home special times,
do you agree about the role of TV in the home,
are bedtimes special times for being close,

do you do special things over the weekends which you both enjoy and value,
you have the same values about entertaining friends and parties in your home,
when one is sick does the other partner take care of them,
do you look forward to family vacations,
is spending morning time together special,
do you enjoy doing errands together,
do you have ways of rejuvenating yourselves when you are burnt out,
do you share similar values in your roles as husband and wife,
do you share similar values in your roles as parents,
do you have compatible views about the role of work in life and friendship,
do you both have similar views on how to balance work and family,
does your partner support your basic mission in life,
does your partner share your views on supporting family and kin,
do you and your partner share goals,
do you and your partner feel like your life together has meshed well,
do you have similar financial goals and similar concerns about potential disasters,
are your life dreams similar or compatible,
are your life dreams respected when they are different,
do you see eye to eye on what home means,
do you have similar values about the role of fun play family and marriage,
do you have similar values about possessions,
do you have similar views about the past,
do you have similar views about retirement, etc.?

Write out of family constitution about shared meanings your family has and what values they have.

Less than a third of US families eat dinner together regularly and many of those that do have the TV on, ending conversation.

Script your family rituals about who does what and make them times which everyone can enjoy.

The scripts include what you do at dinner, how you greet, how you part, the meaning of weekends, the role of family vacations, the true meanings of a holiday your family celebrates, etc.

Consider Christmas midnight Mass to increase the spirituality of Christmas.

One family had a ritual of after dinner drinks where the parents would enjoy a drink while the children played, and the parents would talk after the dinner and up was done. It was a happy cozy time for all.

Romance and intimacy must be planned and made special to be at their best, not just saved for when you're burnt out at the end of the day.

When spouses feel similar expectations for each other the marriage will be well.

That especially applies to the bigger things like philosophies about life, gender roles, parenting styles, how you deal with family, and the role of work. The more you have similar values the better the marriage (though you'll never have completely the same views.) If you connect deeply in some areas of life you won't be thrown off in the few areas where you don't connect deeply.

Consider your roles in life (example: husband, father, member of community, etc.). Consider how your parents approach those roles, then consider how you would like to do them.

Many times we don't discuss our deepest goals or think of them,

but doing so can have a profound impact on marriage. And working on shared goals together enriches marriage.

There should be symbols such as photos objects and family stories which symbolize the values of your family and important past experiences.

Successful marriages don't necessarily overhaul their whole marriage, but they spend five more hours a week on their marriage: a weekly date and some little routines each day. Before leaving in the morning, learn one thing that's going to happen in your partner's day. In the evening make sure you discuss how the day went. Find some way everyday to genuinely communicate appreciation to your spouse.

Kiss and hold each other while you are together. Go on a weekly date. Update your love map on these dates and if necessary work out problems. The weekly date should take about 2 hours a week. All of this together is about 5 hours a week.

It's a false idea that marriages are unhappy because couples have too high of expectations of each other. People with the highest expectations and standards for each other in their marriage usually have the highest quality marriage. By holding your marriage to **high standards you are far more likely to achieve the marriage you want rather than by looking the other way and letting things slide.** Multiple researchers have confirmed this. Those who **refuse to put up with negativity** but instead find ways to work it out end up happier later. You must talk about issues in your marriage before they become major. In a soft, uncritical way let your partner know when you feel out of touch with them and ask what's going on. Beware asking this right before bedtime as it could interfere with sleep.

Have you been irritable, have you been feeling lonely, have you been wanting to spend time apart, have you been angry, have

you been out of touch with each other emotionally, does your partner not know what you're thinking?

When someone has an emotionally unresponsive partner they will become critical. The only way out of this is for both to change.

An innate feeling of self-doubt and worthlessness, someone who has trained to see what is wrong and who is ungrateful, this can lead someone to criticize their spouse, focusing on the spouse's weaknesses. 85% of the time this is the problem in marriages. People think bad about themselves and so they're looking for something bad about their spouse. If you are critical of yourself, work on accepting yourself with all your flaws and your marriage will be helped. Forgiveness for all of your imperfections and flaws helps you grow tremendously as a husband and father and enables you to cherish what is good and strong in yourself and others.

Note - this doesn't mean we stop working toward greatness and Christian ideals, it means we accept that it may take a little time, that God is ok with that, that doing our best doesn't mean running faster than we have strength, that we have the ability to love and appreciate ourselves and others in the journey toward Godliness.

In Judaism prayer is primarily used for thanksgiving and praise. Prayers are not meant for God's benefit but for the benefit of the person who is praying. Prayers help us appreciate the works of God and the beautiful world we have inherited. Prayers help us be thankful for what we have already received, and whatever your religion, there is a message here for marriage.

Thanksgiving and praise are the antidotes to criticism and contempt.

Give genuine praise to your spouse, children, and others. Try to tell people what you genuinely appreciate about them. As you do this you'll begin to forgive yourself. Spiritual amazing grace is all about beginning to appreciate your own accomplishments rather than failures.

When a parent makes a mistake and apologizes to a child it helps the child know that it's okay to make mistakes and that people can recover from them.

Note - if kids don't learn this, they develop a double life, and major catastrophes ensue as they enter into a "Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde" sort of situation, allowing one half of themselves to do whatever is wished without restraint, while attempting public excellence in the other personality. Eventually the monster comes out and exposes the man and ruins his whole life. So avoid this double-life catastrophe by learning to forgive, repent, confess, and repair as you go rather than hiding all your flaws in the closet. Parents can model this for youth, we all always have something to work on, something to apologize for, something to learn, etc.

Sincere apology to a spouse is a very significant event.

Marriage is the Gift, It's Quality is the Gratitude

It's been said that marriage is God's gift to us, and that our gift to God is the quality of our marriage. Truly family is the school of the Gods. This is where we learn compassion. Can we set aside our differences and cultivate charitable love one for another? What when youth or health fade? This shows cords of

love stronger than death, which is just what we need to pull a marriage into the resurrection, bursting all bonds, shining forth in splendor forever. When the going gets rough, these times reveal our truest character, and show the great progress we each have yet to make. These are our opportunities to draw closer, to pray harder, to come to know God and ourselves.

