

Opening Session: The Mission of Marriage

“Modern people make the painfulness of marriage even greater than it has to be, because they crush it under the weight of their almost cosmically impossible expectations.” - Tim Keller

The Issue: If we're not clear about the real purpose of marriage, we'll end up working towards the wrong destination, and disappointed because we can't seem to get there.

The Current State of Marriage = The Chick Flick

“Both men and women today want a marriage in which they can receive emotional and sexual satisfaction from someone who will simply let them ‘be themselves.’ They want a spouse who is fun, intellectually stimulating, sexually attractive, with many common interests, and who, on top of it all, is supportive of their personal goals and of the way they are living now...” - Tim Keller

Marriage today is understood in terms of personal fulfillment.

What makes a marriage good is whether or not it is making you happy.

The Biblical View of Marriage = The Lord of the Rings

The first marriage was not simply marked by friendship and love, but mission. God had a job for Adam and Eve to work to accomplish together.

God has a mission in this world. Therefore, Christian marriages are not simply about receiving the benefits of that mission, but working to advance it.

This mission includes...

- The renewal of the world...so support each other's good work.
- The sanctification of believers...so support and work for your spouse to become more like Jesus.
- The reconciliation of the lost...so share the Good News of Jesus with others through your actions and words.

The success of this mission depends—in part—on the strength of the fellowship.

Keynote: Through Fire & Flood: Growing Closer Together through Life's Trials

The Issue: Going through hard things has the potential to make your marriage, or break your marriage.

The best approach is to establish healthy patterns *before* you encounter hard things.

Things to do in hard seasons:

1. Validate and give space for each other's feelings.
2. Assume the other's good.
3. Work as a team.
4. Smile.

What to do when you want to snap:

1. **Assess:** Where is this feeling coming from? Figure out as best you can where this emotion is coming from and what is contributing to it. Sometimes our feelings are not in alignment with reality, and we need a heart and attitude check.
2. **Express:** Respectfully say you need a minute. Your spouse needs to know what is going on, so give them a cue that you need to cool off, process, or think through what issue you're actually needing to resolve.
3. **Address:** Aim for resolution. Go *toward* your spouse. Don't cast blame on your spouse. Instead, work together for a solution.

Don't waste your trials: Trials can make us bitter, or they can make us better.

- Recognize your testimony is right now, not just after you make it through.
- Learn God's nearness and tenderness.
- Worship.
- Notice the impurities and embrace the opportunities.

Things to do in peaceful seasons:

1. Pursue unity.
2. Practice your skills.
3. Prune.

Saturday Workshop: He Said, She Said: Strategies for Better Communication between Husbands & Wives

Connection: Oneness comes from emotional, spiritual, and physical connection. We need all three.

Filters: You need to be aware of your filters, and your spouse's filters.

Tips to communicate with your husband:

Tips to communicate with your wife:

How to really connect with your spouse:

Communication Workshop

Instructions: Take a few minutes to answer the following questions as a couple. Jot down the answers you give to one another. Feel free to spread out and find a private space in the building. Remember, the goal of this exercise is to work on your communication skills, so even though you will be talking about sensitive issues, try to keep your approach positive.

1. What is a topic that we cannot seem to talk about without everything going haywire and feelings getting hurt? What factors might be contributing to the difficulty in discussing this topic openly and honestly?

2. What patterns do we seem to get stuck in when we talk about that topic? What “filters” might we each have?

3. Several tools for communication were explored in the seminar. Out of these, which would be most helpful for me to use when we talk about this difficult topic?

4. What would it look like for me to use this tool when discussing this topic? (Note: Be specific as possible. Paint a picture. The goal of this exercise is to set both your spouse and yourself up for success when talking about hard things in the future.) If you have something in mind for how your spouse could set your heart at ease when talking about this, share that idea with them.

Saturday Workshop: Creating a Culture of Connection: Recognizing & Responding to Bids for Attention & Affection

“The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less.”

- C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

How Dr. John Gottman’s “Love Lab” predicts marital failure:

- 1) Harsh starts to conflict.
- 2) Negative body language.
- 3) The presence of contempt.

Nurturing fondness helps eliminate harshness

1 Peter 4:8 “Above all, keep your love for one another at full strength, since love covers a multitude of sins.” (CSB)

The power of focus:

- You control what you focus on.
- What you focus on determines whether you think of your spouse in a positive or negative way.
- It is not that strong marriages have no negativity; they simply have overwhelming positivity.

Nurturing Affection Helps Combat Contempt

Bids for Attention & Affection = cues and requests for attention and love.

- They can be verbal (“How was your day?”), or non-verbal (Purposefully looking dejected after a tough day).
- They can be physical (A hug or touch), or non-physical (A text message).
- They can be direct (“Let’s spend some time catching up”), or indirect (“Wow, what a day.”)

“I appreciate...”

From the list below, circle three items that you think are characteristic of your partner (there are probably more than three that describe them, but limit yourself to three). If you're having difficulty coming up with three, define the word *characteristic* very loosely. Even if you can only recall one instance when your partner displayed this characteristic, you can circle it.

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Loving | 24. Athletic | 47. Dependable |
| 2. Sensitive | 25. Cheerful | 48. Nurturing |
| 3. Brave | 26. Graceful | 49. Warm |
| 4. Intelligent | 27. Elegant | 50. Kind |
| 5. Thoughtful | 28. Gracious | 51. Gentle |
| 6. Generous | 29. Playful | 52. Practical |
| 7. Loyal | 30. Caring | 53. Witty |
| 8. Truthful | 31. A great friend | 54. Relaxed |
| 9. Strong | 32. Exciting | 55. Beautiful |
| 10. Energetic | 33. Thrifty | 56. Handsome |
| 11. Sexy | 34. Full of plans | 57. Rich |
| 12. Decisive | 35. Shy | 58. Calm |
| 13. Creative | 36. Vulnerable | 59. Lively |
| 14. Imaginative | 37. Committed | 60. A great partner |
| 15. Fun | 38. Involved | 61. A great parent |
| 16. Attractive | 39. Expressive | 62. Assertive |
| 17. Interesting | 40. Active | 63. Protective |
| 18. Supportive | 41. Careful | 64. Sweet |
| 19. Funny | 42. Reserved | 65. Tender |
| 20. Considerate | 43. Adventurous | 66. Powerful |
| 21. Affectionate | 44. Receptive | 67. Flexible |
| 22. Organized | 45. Reliable | 68. Understanding |
| 23. Resourceful | 46. Responsible | 69. Totally silly |

For each item you circled, briefly think of an actual incident that illustrates this characteristic of your partner. Complete the bottom portion of this worksheet describing the incident.

1. Characteristic:

Incident:

2. Characteristic:

Incident:

3. Characteristic:

Incident:

Share your list with your partner. As you do so, let him or her know what it is about these traits that you value so highly.

Filling Your Emotional & Relational Tank

Below is a long list of activities that some couples do together. Choose the three that you most wish your partner would do with you. You can also circle an item if you and your partner already do it jointly, but you wish you did so more frequently, or that your spouse was more “there” emotionally during the activity.

1. Reunite at the end of the day and talk about how it went.
2. Shop for groceries. Make up the shopping list.
3. Cook dinner, bake.
4. Clean house, do laundry.
5. Shop together for gifts or clothes.
6. Go out (no kids) for brunch or dinner.
7. Help each other with a self-improvement plan (a new class, weight loss, a skill like photography).
8. Plan and host a dinner party.
9. Call each other during the workday.
10. Stay overnight at a romantic hideaway.
11. Eat breakfast together during the work week.
12. Go to church or a Bible study together.
13. Do yard work, home repairs, car maintenance, etc.
14. Volunteer together in the community.
15. Exercise together.
16. Go on weekend outing (picnic, drive)
17. Spend “everyday” time with kids (bedtimes, bath, homework).
18. Take the kids on outings (zoo, museum, dinner).
19. Attend school functions (teacher conferences).
20. Stay in touch with/spend time with family (parents in-law, siblings).
21. Entertain out-of-town guests.
22. Travel together.
23. Watch TV or a movie.
24. Order takeout.
25. Double-date with friends.
26. Attend sporting events.
27. Engage in a favorite activity (bowl, bicycle, hike, jog, horseback ride, camp, swim, water-ski).
28. Talk or read by an open fire.
29. Listen to music.
30. Go dancing or attend a concert, jazz club, theater.
31. Take your child to lessons or practice.
32. Attend a child’s sport event or performance.
33. Pay bills.
34. Write letters or thank-you cards.
35. Work at home, but be together in some way.
36. Drive to or from work together.
37. Celebrate milestones (promotion, retirement)
38. Play computer games.
39. Supervise children’s play dates.
40. Plan vacations.
41. Plan your future together. Dream.
42. Walk the dog.
43. Read out loud.
44. Play a board game or card game.
45. Put on plays or skits together.
46. Engage in hobbies (painting, sculpting, music).
47. Talk over drinks.
48. Make time to talk without interruptions or distractions.
49. Help out other people.
50. Hunt for a new house or apartment.
51. Test-drive new cars.
52. Other: _____

Share your top three choices with each other. Try to keep things positive instead of complaining. Rather than “*You never do _____ with me.*” Try: “*I love being with you and I want to spend more time with you doing things we love.*” Rather than being critical of what your partner has not done in the past, focus on what you would like to have happen now.

After sharing, make a commitment to do one of your partners top choices at some point this month. Discuss how you could make this work, and put it on the calendar. This moves the idea from preference to reality, and honors your partner’s wishes.

Panel Discussion (Room for Notes):

Closing Session:

Fighting for Love: Why Spouses Must Be Spiritual Allies