

Volume

3

MARRIAGE MANUAL

Christian Counseling Centers of Indiana

Helping Hearts Heal

Christian Counseling Centers of Indiana

Exploring Your Marriage

Exploring Your Marriage is a process for couples to take a close look at their marriage. They may have a good marriage or a not so good marriage. It doesn't matter. There are no perfect marriages. When we look in the Bible we see no perfect marriages only couples struggling to deal with their marriages.

The Bible talks a lot about marriages, but it talks to husbands about their marriages and wives about their marriages. It never talks to couples. Scripture is always about taking individual responsibility. I may want my marriage to be better or more specifically my spouse to change, but the only changes I can bring about directly are changes to myself. If I take responsibility and change then my spouse might change.

This manual allows couples or individuals to explore their own marriages. The principles in this manual were developed in working with several couples and individuals on their own marriages for over two decades. Sometimes they were learned by mistakes that the counselor and/or counselee made. However, God can use even our mistakes to teach us.

Applying the principles and concepts in this material may give you an opportunity to change and perhaps your marriage an opportunity to change as well. There are no guarantees. Change is a result of commitment as well as capacity. I used to think if people wanted to change they could--now I not so sure. I have worked with a lot of people who did desire change and made the commitment to do so. Try as they might, nothing seemed to work. The missing ingredient seems to be the will of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. If he wants us to change and we desire to do so, change will occur. Therefore, pray carefully while you begin this process to see if it is what God wills for your life.

Paul said in the seventh chapter of First Corinthians he would like to spare us the suffering marriage can bring. Whenever you take two independent people and put them together, something has to give. Our two basic needs are freedom and security. We see these basic needs both acting out and coming in conflict in marriage.

Examine your own marriage and see where you want it to change and where you are content with it. Everything isn't all bad or all good. A realistic appraisal is a good place to start. As you examine your marriage look for what you do well and what you do wrong. We need both. We can build on the things you do well and consider how to make changes to the things you do wrong. Begin to accept responsibility for your own contributions to the marriage, both positive and negative. It is only when you do that a realistic assessment may take place. May God bless you as you evaluate your marriage and consider those things you would like to change. Please be honest and fair with yourself and your spouse. Remember God ordained marriage and he can change marriages. It is sometimes permissible to God that marriages divorce, but is rarely preferable.

A Marriage Appraisal

When we buy a house we do an appraisal. We walk through the house and do a critical examination of the condition of the house. If we are interested in buying the house we aren't going to just mentally tear it down, but we want to know what is wrong and right with it before we sign on the dotted line.

In the same way I would like you to examine your marriage. What is right and wrong with it? Be honest with your spouse and yourself. Where are you doing things right and where do you believe you need improvement? We are not going to tear the house down when we appraise it. We are not going to tear the marriage down when we appraise it either. After all we are planning on living in the house. We do not want to damage it.

Think about the characteristics of a house. What kind of foundation does it have? Does the roof leak? Is the basement dry? What kind of heat does it have? Are the walls solid? Do the floors creak? How comfortable is it? How will we keep it cool? What will it cost to make repairs? What do I like about it? What is my favorite room? If I were going to make changes what changes would I make and where would I start?

Scripture describes a man who began to build a house without first counting the cost. He got halfway through and couldn't finish it due to lack of money. It also talks about a wise man that built his house on a rock and a foolish man who built his house on the sand. We need a good foundation. For purposes of this manual, Jesus is our sure foundation. The characteristics we are going to ask you to examine are found in scripture. As a couple or individual I ask you to examine the scripture with each principle or characteristic first to see where you stand with God. Then we will consider how to practically apply these characteristics to your own lives and marriages.

Sometimes it is wise to explore these characteristics as a couple. Sometimes it is better to explore them individually first then as a couple. You might ask your counselor if you have one what he or she recommends. Since communication can be difficult especially in a sensitive area it is our desire to improve your marriage if and when necessary and not to damage or hurt it in any way. Sometimes individuals and couples are ready to examine their marriages and sometimes they are not. This in itself does not make them good or bad. It might make them discrete. Let us show grace to our selves and our spouses in this process and only proceed as the Spirit leads and we are ready.

When you are ready examine the ten principles of *Marital Character* that follow. Just as individuals are made up of characteristics that shape their character, marriages are made up of characteristics that shape their character as well. These characteristics can be examined all together and be applied gradually for desired change. You may find you and your spouse do them all well or only some of them well. Either way, be honest and loving in your appraisal and remember to speak the truth in love to your spouse at all times. Only information that builds stronger marriages is desirable. Communication that tears the marriage down serves no purpose. You may need to tear a wall down to improve the house, but do it together as a couple. If you are doing this together as a couple you need to realize that neither of you "are the problem" but since you are no longer two but one if one of you has a problem you both have a problem. God bless you as you and your spouse lovingly examine and communicate on your marriage. Remember you are going to have to live in the house following the appraisal.

Completion of the Marriage Appraisal

After reviewing the above Marital Character principles and practices as an individual, discuss with your spouse where you believe your strengths and weaknesses lie in the marriage. Remember to discuss both strengths and weakness.

Without blaming your spouse begin to consider together changes you might like to make in the marriage at this time. Discuss these changes thoughtfully with your spouse in a non-critical way. If at any time you feel you are being too critical or are being criticized stop until you can resume the appraisal without criticism or until you can meet with your counselor.

Below are some sections for you to reflect on your appraisal and draw some conclusions. What do you like and dislike individually and as a couple? What do you want to change and what do you want to keep the same? Remember you are not necessarily going to make any changes you are just doing an appraisal and thinking about what changes you could make. It is similar to buying a house and deciding what you can live with and what you need to change to make the house livable. Be kind to each other in the process, but be accurate in your assessment if you want changes to be made. You are not changing your spouse. You are thinking about changing your marriage.

Here are the things we do well, these are our strengths: Husband's comments

Wife's comments

Here are the things we don't do well: Wife's comments

Husband's comments

Here is what we would like to change: Husband's comments

Wife's comments

Here are the things we agree need to stay the same: things we like about our marriage

Here are the things we agree we need to change: things we don't like about our marriage

Husband's signature _____ date _____

Wife's signature _____ date _____

Counselor's signature _____ date _____

Guidelines Before Beginning Couple's Counseling

There are three guidelines that we have found helpful in working with couples that we recommend reviewing before beginning counseling as a couple. All the guidelines may not apply to you, but one or more may.

The first guideline has to do with separation. While we don't encourage divorce, we do realize there are times when a planned separation may be necessary for the preservation of the marriage. Next we have the bonding guidelines. Bonding guidelines are helpful in working with couples who are not yet married, considering re-bonding after separation, or have had a period of time of emotional detachment where they are uncertain about or uncomfortable with their level of intimacy. Finally we have sexual guidelines that are applicable to all our couples regardless of their marital state.

One additional guideline we have found helpful for all couples regardless of the quality of their marriage is to set aside two special times each week. The first has to do with conversation and the second with physical intimacy. Each couple needs a time weekly to talk and to have sex. Different times are needed for each. We recommend an hour to an hour and half for each on different days. The most difficult thing we deal with is marital drift. This helps eliminate the marital drift.

Below are the three guidelines for you to consider. Please examine them closely and discuss them as a couple and with your counselor as appropriate.

Guidelines for Separation

Under certain circumstances separation is necessary to preserve a marriage or prevent divorce or further damage to the marriage. If there is adultery, abuse, addiction, or abandonment, then separation may be necessary and helpful.

What do I do when I am not ready to divorce and I can't live with my spouse due to marital unfaithfulness and deception?

1. I need to separate until I have God's peace.
2. My spouse needs to be faithful during this time.
3. My spouse needs to be financially responsible during this time.
4. I need to be in counseling individually to receive support.
5. My spouse also needs to be in counseling.
6. We need to limit contact until or unless our counselor believes we are ready.
7. We can begin to restore our relationship when our counselor believes we are ready to resume marital counseling.
8. Our goal is to restore the marriage if at all possible and if both parties are willing to work on the relationship *after* first dealing with their own individual issues.
9. As God directs and gives me a sense of peace I will continue, stop, or divorce.
10. Until or unless I have a sense of peace from God, I will wait and work.

Dan L. Boen, Ph.D., HSPP, Licensed Psychologist

*Director of Christian Counseling Centers of Indiana
April 4, 2002*

MARITAL BONDING

Rules

1. Refrain from any and all physical or sexual contact until prescribed.
2. Do not tease or mention anything of a physical or sexual nature.
3. Respect any and all boundaries. Security is important.
4. Define where the bonding activity is to take place, i.e., bedroom, etc.
5. Limit the bonding activity to the agreed upon place.
6. Set at least three 20-minute sessions for each level and activity.
7. Stop if the activity in any way becomes threatening or uncomfortable.
8. If you stop, no explanation is required and it is not a failure.
9. Wait until the next counseling session to go any farther in the process.
10. Always make each step a matter of prayer.

Steps

1. Make yourself comfortable. Pray first. Set aside twenty uninterrupted minutes. Encourage conversation. *Hold hands.* Nothing more at this level. **Stop if you become uncomfortable at any time!**
2. Have the husband put his arm around the wife. Nothing more, nothing else. All other rules apply as above. Again you need at least three twenty minute uninterrupted sessions at this level.
3. First kiss. With his arm around her, the husband may kiss his wife with her permission during the three twenty minute sessions. Please remember to keep the kisses short and sweet. We are not going for passion at this level, but for comfort and security. If at any time either of you become uncomfortable during this step, stop or wait until the next session to talk about it before going further.
4. At this level, the husband may now put both arms around his wife with her permission. Again, her comfort and security is of utmost important. It is frequently at this level that the wife becomes most uncomfortable and feels this is a cue to further sexual behavior. She may feel trapped. Stop if she does and examine what is happening.
5. Extended kissing begins at this level. Set the timer for kissing to begin at 4 five-minute intervals. The kissing can become more passionate, but needs to stop at 30 seconds. Thirty seconds is a long kiss. The wife or husband may become uncomfortable. Stop if either one does. We are now deepening the passion or Eros in the relationship.
6. Hands can now be used to explore the upper part of the body with the exception of no genital contact. Fully clothed shoulder rubs are excellent at this level. Continue the kissing with increasing frequency. Remember, conversation is equally important. Do not forget to focus on your spouse. He or she is the reason you are engaged in this process. ***If you are not married, you need to stop at this point and focus on emotional and not physical intimacy!***

SEX

Guidelines for Christian Sexuality

1. Sex is an act of God. Therefore sex is okay!
2. Thinking about sex is okay. Read the Song of Solomon.
3. Sex is to be directed by the Holy Spirit.
4. Sex needs to be pleasurable, safe, and mutually satisfying.
5. Sex needs to be between a husband and wife exclusively.
6. If a wife doesn't feel secure she doesn't make love.
7. It is okay for a single person to pleasure themselves if they are not with or thinking about someone else.
8. For a married person self-pleasuring is okay if focusing only on their spouse and not using instead of mutual pleasuring.
9. Don't withhold sex from your spouse except for a short time by mutual agreement.
10. There are times and reasons during the course of your life where not having sex are legitimate.
11. Sex must be tied to our spirituality. It cannot be separated from who we are spiritually.
12. Sex needs to be an act of intimacy ordained by God and under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Communication for Husbands

1. Use the language of experience to communicate emotional issues.
2. Manage the urgent; wait on the important.
3. Don't be afraid to repeat things.
4. You are not always wrong, but you are always different.
5. Hear her out. She needs to be listened to, always.
6. Security matters to her foremost; freedom matters to you.
7. You want sex; she wants emotional intimacy.
8. Schedule time once a week to handle important and critical issues.
9. We are not going to understand our wives and it is not our fault. They are different.
10. As men we need to think about things. Schedule time away from your spouse to think before dealing with difficult issues.
11. Men don't get hurt, i.e. "you hurt my feelings"- we get angry. Deal appropriately with your anger.
12. Don't talk when you are tired. Wait until you are rested.
13. Have a time every week to talk and a time every week to have sex. They are not the same time.
14. Wives want to be understood. They don't understand their husbands anymore than their husbands understand them. But we have to try to understand and help them understand us. This is communication.