

A Principled Marriage!



OUR CONTEXT

I have enjoyed the privilege (and sometimes wild ride) of engaging in pre-marital and marriage counseling with numerous couples over my years as a teacher, counselor, and elder. It has always been amazing to me how much time and money goes into a wedding day - and how proportionately little time goes toward preparing to build a fruitful marriage.

We were as dumb as rocks (inexperienced) when we married (well, at least I was), yet our Father has been amazingly gracious to Burney and me. He has been with us "through good times and bad, sickness and health, in wealth and poverty" as well as immaturity and times of rigorous growth. Side by side with our good friends we have picked up a few things in the process - so here you go!

My Strong Home.com
A Principled Marriage

A healthy marriage is based upon principle. From the beginning marriage was intended to provide **companionship** and **partnership** for the needs and rigors of life.

When it comes right down to it, I wonder how many men and women would be willing to give anything to find one life partner that could fulfill the needs of friend, lover, partner and companion? I am frightened and saddened to think of a generation of enlightened and independent once-married men and women living out lives of loneliness and isolation, when an effective (and principled) marriage is within everyone's grasp.

We have had to work hard to be such partners. By discovering principles and continuing to rededicate ourselves to those principles, we have built the foundation and rooms of our marriage home. This has often occurred despite our shortcomings!

The first subject we consider is the **Stages of Marriage**. It is hard as newlyweds to even comprehend the big picture on an enduring marriage. As we understand and apply His principles we can step around the tapestry to see the reverse side of a progressing but not yet finished product. In our microwave world it is difficult to conceive that an enduring marriage is built slowly, step by step, layer by layer.

These foundations are carefully established as we grow together in the first five to ten years of a marriage. What it means to be **partners**, how our **original families** impact us, and our developed **communication** abilities all have a significant bearing on the condition (or existence) of our long term relationship. How we come to terms with our mutually defined standards for **romance** and how we **plan together** in pursuit of our hopes and dreams impact the quality and longevity of our relationship and oneness.

**The next page describes and outlines the stages of marriage.
Review the stages and answer these questions:**

1. In which stage do we currently find ourselves? _____
2. In which stages have we experienced success? _____
3. In what stages have we blown it? _____
4. Do we have a view toward an enduring marriage? _____
5. How effective have we been at achieving oneness in our relationship?

Listen to the video "A Principled Marriage."

The Stages of Marriage

1 GROWING UP

Through our childhood, young adulthood, and single life we formulate a view of marriage. This is influenced by our parents and relatives, peers, reading and other forms of media, as well as our various encounters with the opposite sex. It is during these years that we formulate our answer to the question:

What do I think that marriage involves?

2 DATING & COURTSHIP

As we enter into puberty we experience such things as infatuation and understanding the basics of the beginnings of commitment. Here we are concerned with acceptance, establishing and living up to values, developing interests, and experiencing the fulfillment of our needs through romance. Here we ask the question:

What do I hope that marriage will bring to me?

3 COMMITMENT & BUILDING

Here we face the realities of married life. The honeymoon is over, the newness is worn off. We either learn and grow or fall to independence and conflict of the will. It is time to work and surrender to a new marriage system. It is time to accept and modify the two family systems we brought into the relationship. It is time to solidify our mutual commitment to the purpose for our marriage, and to establish a marriage that follows higher principles. Here we ask the question:

What am I willing to give to my marriage?

4 GROWING & PERSEVERING

Deep and enduring affections characterize this stage of marriage. We have established our values and interests and shared our lives with one another. We continue to grow individually and together. We are becoming older and have the choice to turn and help those who are younger. We ask ourselves the question (and hope we are happy with the answer):

Am I able to appreciate/accept what my marriage is becoming?

The Marriage Foundation

..Marriage was given to complete Man & Woman.
 ...Companionship is the highest relational priority in life.
 ...We need associations that encourage us in this process.
 ...When we get stuck we should find help.

PARTNERS	ORIGINS
COMMUNICATION	
ROMANCE	PLANNING
ONENESS	

PARTNERS

- ___ ___ Partners learn to trust each other and divide responsibilities, maximizing strengths and minimizing weaknesses.
- ___ ___ Partners learn to recognize, give, and receive valid criticism (differentiated from personal preferences with self-centered motives).
- ___ ___ Partners never run their spouse down in front of others and they are careful to build and maintain mutual respect.
- ___ ___ Partners are very interested in each other's spiritual welfare and truly desire to see their spouse excel and grow in all areas of life.

FAMILY OF ORIGIN

- ___ ___ You do marry your spouse's family system.
- ___ ___ A new system must be allowed to develop, but we are by nature resistant (It takes a decade).
- ___ ___ We cannot afford to be overly critical or blindly accepting of our own or our spouse's family of origin, which could cause us to overreact or avoid helpful insights and make healthy modifications.
- ___ ___ Negative and unhealthy influence must be grown through from myself and my spouse outward as we take care to face our weaknesses and cultivate our strengths.
- ___ ___ We are developing healthy community support relationships.

COMMUNICATION

- ___ ___ Opposites do attract and difficulty in communication is normal.
- ___ ___ Communication patterns and needs often differ.
- ___ ___ Character qualities and personalities are a double-edged sword and greatly impact our ability to communicate.
- ___ ___ To not communicate is the epitome of self-centeredness. We can be so ego-centric that meaningful and satisfying communication is the exception, not the rule. The embittered will not communicate.

THE MARRIAGE FOUNDATION CONTINUED:

ROMANCE

___ ___ Negative or unrealistic pre-conceptions develop dysfunctional shortfalls and expectations for intimacy and sex.

___ ___ Affection must permeate our lifestyle. Physical touch, verbal encouragement, and caring body language are all critical.

Here are several key expressions of romance:

___ ___ He or she is interested in things that are important to me.

___ ___ He or she is a willing participator in the mutual responsibilities of our life together.

___ ___ He or she is physically affectionate and initiates non-sexual contact, offering me affection and emotional support when I need it.

___ ___ We have a satisfying and growing physical relationship, taking care to not let our intimacy be consumed by selfishness, bad habits or disproportionate life demands.

___ ___ Bitterness, feeling sorry for myself, and an out of control temper are in check in our lives together.

PLANNING

___ ___ We know and share our goals, taking the time to check signals and make plans.

___ ___ We consult and communicate on important decisions that we make.

___ ___ We actively plan activities and experiences that maximize both of our strengths and minimize our weaknesses.

___ ___ We have a system and "appointed times" for recording our memories and reflecting upon our achievement milestones.

ONENESS

___ ___ I embrace the concept of independent responsibility for my personal spiritual welfare.

___ ___ I contribute to experiencing a living, spiritual, mutual exchange.

___ ___ We are facing and negotiating the difficulties of living by one another's past and present decisions/challenges.

___ ___ The fear factor in angry issues (broken trust and respect) is under control in our lives.

___ ___ The arrogance factor in angry issues (lack of compassionate love) is under control in our lives.

Here are some helpful thoughts on developing your marriage as a partnership.

What are your individual goals for your marriage? In what ways do they overlap?

How would you rate your mutual respect for one another?

How would you rate your shared compassion for one another?

The overall focus of your marriage:

- ___ Build it on **Empathy**...this is the ability to put yourself in your spouse's place and to truly search after his or her best interests.
- ___ Enemies of empathy: A driving or intolerant personality, an uninvolved or aloof partner, and a non-reflective or overly busy lifestyle.
- ___ Build it on **Maturity**...this is the learned wisdom of acting responsibly and unselfishly toward your spouse.
- ___ Enemies of maturity: Unrealistic views of life and marriage, uncontrolled anger or temper, uncontrolled lust or jealousy, and baggage from my family of origin.
- ___ Build it on **Dignity**...dignity is the ability to be gracious, thoughtful, and measured about our responses to life's challenges.
- ___ Enemies of dignity: An unrestrained tongue, wandering affections, or a scoffing heart.

An overall principled understanding on a marriage partnership includes:

What are the attractive qualities in any man or woman?

How is a spouse to deal with what he or she feels is unacceptable in their spouse?

What is the root of most women's anger? Most men's anger?

How are respect and trust established in the arena of a marriage relationship?

What does it mean to "live with your spouse in an understanding way?"

How do we "give honor" to someone as a partner in life?

The family in which we each grew up has tremendous impact upon our newly established marriage. Together we must **experience the freedom to develop our own family system**. Here are some helpful insights:

1. To experience a learned ability to discuss one another's family of origin without a critical spirit.
2. Gradually establishing a mutually agreed upon understanding concerning our combined family of origin can be very helpful.
3. Giving yourself and your spouse time to sort out and deal with the positive and negative aspects of your family of origin over a period of years is key.
4. **Taking care to together decide what you want for your own family system** and determining why you want it, as well as designing strategies for learning how to make these qualities a part of your daily lives together is critical.

MY FAMILY BACKGROUND

Take this opportunity to complete an evaluation of your perceptions of your own and your spouse's family of origin, taking care to be specific, concise, kind, and as non-judgmental as you know how to be.

HUSBAND OF OWN FAMILY: Strengths	Weaknesses
HUSBAND OF WIFE'S FAMILY: Strengths	Weaknesses
WIFE OF OWN FAMILY: Strengths	Weaknesses
WIFE OF HUSBAND'S FAMILY: Strengths	Weaknesses

Communication is one of those things we will probably never master. And it also takes continued attention as time passes and life-changes occur. **Here are some ideas on how to become better communicators.** Answer the question: "In what ways have we addressed these concepts and principles?"

1. Don't let the sun go down on your anger without coming to resolution.

2. Don't allow yourself to be entrapped in bitterness.

3. Learn a willingness to humble yourself and pray, knowing that all grumbling and complaining is ultimately against God.

4. Pay attention to each others heart. Keep working on your marriage system and marriage relationship. Define the places where you are not connecting.

Define and build upon the places you are connecting.

5. Spend time together alone, cultivating mutual interests and evaluating current successes and failures. Communicate every day!

6. Include a mutually agreed upon objective third person when you get stuck.

7. Identify other serious-minded couples with whom to grow and learn.

My Strong Home.com
Keys to Communication
(continued)

Day Five

TO TALK ABOUT:

What are the things that make me angry?

What are the things that make me fearful?

Are there any mutual or individual roots of bitterness in our lives?

What part does forgiveness play in our relationship?

What mechanisms do you find that help you to humble yourself?

I feel my spouse and I don't connect when...

I feel my spouse and I connect when...

I feel my spouse and I disconnect when...

I feel we are cultivating mutual interests when we...

I believe that we are stuck in the area of...

A mutually agreed upon person with whom we would both be willing to consult would be...

The other people with whom we commune and share our lives are...

Keep the Heart-Fires Burning

"Growing up in our culture I have discovered we know very little about true love."

How can I know if I am experiencing true love? True love involves sex, but is obviously not merely sex. Commitment is apparently a part of true love, but how does one keep a long-term commitment? (Should I even expect long-term commitment?)

Just how much of myself should I be willing to sacrifice for the sake of someone I love (and won't I run the danger of losing myself if I go too far)?

We have grown up and matured in a very confusing atmosphere with many mixed and varied signals!

We have found several principles helpful for kindling the spark in our relationship.

This in no way implies that we do not highly value our consistent and deep long-term commitment to each other, but we have come to recognize that there are things that we can do to keep the romance in our relationship!

- ___ Don't quit experiencing new things together, and don't be afraid to rediscover old ones!
- ___ Continue to explore your partners interests.
- ___ Don't let romance and sex get boring.
- ___ Don't stay angry or bitter without getting help.
- ___ Pursue enjoyable and encouraging relationships with other couples who love and enjoy each other.
- ___ Reflect and recount your successes.
- ___ Don't be afraid to openly discuss your defeats, shortcomings, and fears.
- ___ Be lifelong companions and friends, choosing not to live separate lives.

Companionship is the key to a satisfying marriage, and to live as true friends is worth the work - and the gold standard for real partner spirituality!

Date _____

As we look to the future it is profitable to establish short and long-term marital goals, taking into account significant areas of marriage need. The following checklist is given as a sounding board with which to identify pertinent issues and celebrate growth in oneness. Both partners should indicate their own choices and come together to define perceptions. This exercise is something that can be done periodically throughout the various stages of a marriage!

MY CHOICES:

MY PARTNER'S CHOICES:

- ___ Accomplishments and qualities to be verbalized ___
- ___ Cultivating mutual interests and learning one another's interests ___
- ___ Friendship building strategies between spouses ___
 - ___ Satisfying needs for intimacy ___
 - ___ Approaching no talk issues ___
- ___ Destructive individual patterns to correct ___
- ___ Destructive partner patterns to correct ___
- ___ Constructive patterns to encourage ___
- ___ The need for individual counseling in areas where we are stuck ___
- ___ The need for marriage counseling in areas where we are stuck ___
- ___ Values which need to be strengthened in our marriage ___
- ___ Financial expectations, communication, and patterns that affect us ___
 - ___ Specific decisions that need to be made (our process) ___
- ___ Friendship building strategies with others that can encourage our marriage ___

A marriage is never static. Issues from within and without cause needs in a marital relationship to continually modify and sometimes even change. We must not lose our composure or be surprised at our difficulties, but press on to maturity in marriage!

Based upon the above areas of measurable goals, over the next few months in our marriage we purpose to:
