

CRITICAL ISSUES IN MARITAL SUCCESS AND FAILURE

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INTRODUCTION

Every marriage has its problems and there are certain factors that decide whether or not these problems are overcome, i.e. whether the marriage succeeds or fails. Most marriages fail because the couples involved have not been educated with regard to what marriage involves. No couple should take the struggles of marriage for granted, they must prepare themselves if they are to overcome.

This brief paper seeks to outline problems and challenges in marriage, from the stage of finding a mate, to the later years in life.

It is being suggested that as you read about each problem or desired behaviour, you as well as your partner can rate yourselves. This should help in pre-marital decision-making as well as in mental growth.

Spirituality

References have been made in the contents of this publication to spirituality. This is not meant to coerce. Rather, it is meant to help those who see spirituality as central, and those who share such a quest to voluntarily deepen their search.

Those who wish to apply the approaches discussed to their religion of choice may do so. Others may wish not to include formal religion in their lifestyle.

Your freedom of choice is respected. The rest of the material should, nevertheless, be highly useful to you as they are based on scientific principles.

FINDING A MATE

The young adult, in seeking to find a mate for life, experiences too much social pressure, ridicule, as well as attempts by others to “make a match”. With these factors against them, they are faced with the danger of settling down too quickly. Young persons should be allowed by parents and counsellors to experience several relationships for a while if they wish and can, so that they may choose wisely.

Problems can exist in finding the right mate. Young people would be involved in healthy group activities (e.g. sports, community and church youth groups, etc.) where they can meet several people of the opposite sex. They will need educational group discussions and counselling on what to look for in a mate, and what is required of them in successful marriage and family living.

While dating, young adults will face problems such as how far to go in sexual behaviour and whether or not to use contraceptives. Helping these persons to decide on these issues will prevent unwanted and illegitimate pregnancies or hasty “shotgun” marriages which often don’t work out.

THE PROBLEMS OF MARRIAGE

When a partner is chosen, then come the **inevitable problems** of marriage. To what extent do the problems below affect you?

	Not at all	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Sexual adjustment				
Dealing with in-laws				

	Not at all	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Managing money				
Agreeing on how to raise children				
Running the home				
The working wife				
Not sharing each other's religion				
Sharing of interests and recreation				
Staying out late				

These issues should be regularly discusses and agreements made both before and during stages of marriage.

Also there are the **more serious problems** that couples face. These can destroy a marriage very early. They can also destroy the health of one or both spouses. Professional help should be sought.

	Not at all	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Having different friends				
Excessive jealousy				
Family planning				
Sexual unfaithfulness				
Alcoholism				
Gambling addiction				
Domestic abuse (verbal, emotional, physical, sexual)				

Community Health Workers and Counsellors can help promote discussion groups and special counselling in neighbourhoods, clubs or churches. Where couples contemplating marriage and those already married can discuss these issues.

One problem causing conflict and unfaithfulness in the home is the “commitment phobia” of many men with regards to marriage. This absence of a Father in childhood and adolescence prevents boys from learning how to exercise the masculine role being effective husbands and fathers.

In some cultures this started with slavery when one's ancestors were forbidden to marry. It also relates to the economic problems of many men in opposed cultures and subcultures. As well, extreme poverty and unemployment can be barriers to effective family life.

THE “TEN COMMANDMENTS” OF MARITAL SUCCESS

Health workers and counsellors therefore need, in a tactful way, to help our young men to learn how to make a marriage work. For both sexes, solving the problems of marriage include the behaviours stated below. These start from the time of being gentle with each other during the honeymoon to being gentle to each other in old age. Rate yourselves in these.

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
1) Spending regular times in communication by talking together				
2) Trying to discuss all marriage problems that arise rather than leaving them alone to solve themselves				
3) Keeping romance alive by showing regular affection	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
and saying “I love you”.				
4) Being willing to say a) “I am sorry” b) “I forgive you”				
5) Showing affection, love and patience in sex , rather than just “rushing it” for one’s pleasure only				
6) Allowing each other independence to work and have friends and a social life without being unduly jealous				
7) At the same time, a) sharing interests b) going out together regularly				
8) Sharing the responsibility of running the home . (The man is never inactive while the working wife is on her feet in the home!) Also each partner allows involvement without destructive criticism.				
9) Working out how decisions are made				
10) Sharing in bible reading, prayer and exhorting one another				

Marriage counselling and research has proven that if any of these rules are not obeyed, the marriage will automatically fail as most of the problems mentioned earlier will not be solved. As many of our young men are unmarried fathers, they may need to be educated gently as part of helping them to settle down.

Intimacy or Control?

What holds your marriage together? Is it intimacy or control? Intimacy may be defined as “having a close friend or confidante” as “being of one heart, mind and flesh”.

The four A's of Intimacy

What are the “vitamins” of intimacy? They are as follows:

- Affection
- Affirmation
- Appreciation
- Anger As Feedback

How would you rate yourself with regards to frequency and extent?

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
Affection (physical and verbal)				

- 1) The skin is made for touching. Hugs promote health and “I love you” can never be said too often.

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
Affirmation				

- 2) All of us need praise. Even if we know we are OK, it can never be enough.

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
Appreciation				

- 3) Never take what your spouse does for you for granted. Let them know what the smallest positive act means to you.

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
Anger as Feedback				

- 4) “Be angry and sin not”. Anger held in is harmful. Abusive anger destroys a friendship. Expressing anger in love builds relationships as the other person can know when he or she is acting inappropriately or hurtfully.

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
Letting your hurt and annoyance be known or your spouse will never be aware of when they are upsetting you				
Nevertheless, sharing your anger with respect				
Using “I statements”, such as, “I felt hurt by what you said”				

Avoiding “you statements”, such as, “you upset me”. This avoids pointing the finger and provoking defensiveness. My being hurt could be due to my misunderstanding.				
Avoiding the extreme of withdrawing into silence.				

Avoiding the opposite extreme of acting out one’s anger by e.g. shouting, swearing, calling names, labelling, sarcasm, nagging, threatening, shoving, arm twisting or hitting. These behaviours have no place in any shape or form, in any marriage no matter how much the other partner has hurt you.

You may feel that you have won a war but you would have lost a friend. In expressing anger, seek to offer a solution to the problem, not just to blame.

Ask for timeout if you are feeling too upset to take part in a discussion. Avoid discussions when either or both partners are too upset to discuss rationally. It is also best to avoid arguments.

Rate yourself:

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
Shouting				
Swearing				
Name calling				
Labelling				
Sarcasm				
Nagging				
Threatening				
Shoving				
Arm Twisting				
Hitting				

THE BARRIER OF EGOISM

What can one do to achieve this type of intimacy with the four vitamins or A’s? *This involves deciding which comes first love of self, self, or love of one’s partner.*

Intimacy comes through selflessness \implies *The barrier to intimacy is egoism* \implies *Egoism*

leads to control \implies *Control involves trying to take over the life of the other by manipulation and intimidation.*

Rate yourself with regard to frequency and extent:

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
Manipulation – “I’ll alter him”, “I’ll put her in her place”				
Intimidation – “That’s one – watch out for the next time”				

To lose self on the alter of love is to gain marital bliss in the garden of intimacy. To put self in the place of love is to lose marital bliss in the wilderness of control.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is one of the lifelines of day to day marital success. Here are some features of this:

- 1) Makings oneself available to communicate with each other without any distractions.
- 2) Avoiding interrupting the other person before they have completed what they have to say – even if you thoroughly disagree with what is being said!
- 3) Reflecting on what the other person has said, or ‘turning it around’ in your mind, before giving a reply – even if you thoroughly disagree, at the start, with what is being said!
- 4) Repeating in your own words what you understood the person to say before answering: both the facts they expressed as well as the feelings, e.g. “I am hearing you say that the electricity bill has not been paid for some time and that has made you upset”.

The New Addition

Partners both need to make adjustments during pregnancy. While the woman is pregnant she is absorbed with her coming child. She may look less sexually desirable and medical problems may even make sex difficult. This is a high risk period for adultery. The husband is required to:

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
1) Be extra supportive.				
2) Affirm his wife’s positive outer and inner beauty.				

The wife needs to:

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
1) Reassure her husband of her love and maintain her affection.				
2) Explain carefully if sex is not advised.				

After delivery the new addition to the family is a potential competitor for the attentions an intimacy between partners. This is another high-risk period for affairs.

The husband needs to:

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great

1) Be equally involved with his partner in caring for the child.				
2) Be extra attentive to his wife.				

The new mother needs to:

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Great
1) Be extra attentive to her husband.				
2) To try to get breaks and babysitting help to allow for sex and dating.				

PARTNERS AS PARENT

Childrearing

For the raising of children and adolescents to be successful, all the following are necessary:

Rate yourself:

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Adequate
1) Love and affection given unconditionally				
2) Praise with consistency				
3) Discipline with consistency				

Discipline must be combined equally with the other aspects. **Both parents must agree** on what is right and wrong for the child.

WORK AND THE FAMILY: WHICH IS PRIORITY?

One problem faced by many young men is that they work so hard trying to be successful and to make money for the family. Increasingly, as women are moving up the corporate ladder and as family expenses increase, they too face these challenges. Thus both spouses are in danger of **neglecting** to do the following:

Rate yourself:

	Not done	Little	Moderate	Adequate
1) Spending enough time and being friends with their wives				
2) Spending enough time and being friends with their children				

One may be anxious to prove one's manhood or feminine competence in the workplace, yet the **family should come first (next to God and looking after one's wellness)**. If it does not, then it will fall apart.

THE LATER YEARS

At this stage individuals are no longer young. Women can no longer enjoy the fulfilment of having children. Also they may feel their beauty is fading. Men feel that they have passed their most productive period at work and job security can become threatened by younger persons with more training. Youthful sexual virility can fall off (even if not greatly). The children are now likely to be on their own and needing parents much less. All this can lead to depression and a feeling of uselessness.

Rate yourself:

	Not at all	Mild	Moderate	Severe
1) Husband and wife tend to take out the frustrations of their mid-life or middle-age problems on each other				
2) With the children being on their own, spouses will have more time with each other. This means more time for increasing conflicts and arguments if they have been having marital problems.				
3) The man or the woman may be tempted to take an interest in younger persons of the opposite sex to try to prove that he or she is “still young” . Some husbands become the “baby father” for teenagers or unmarried young women.				
4) The woman needs to give new attention to her husband and keep herself attractive for him.				
5) Both can be helped to understand each other’s problems and to show the extra affection, understanding and love needed.				
6) The husband needs to be especially courteous and attentive .				

Community health workers and counsellors, through counselling, can help conflicts in the later years to achieve all these aspects of adjustments.

CONCLUSION

Selfless love as shown in I Corinthians 13 and Ephesians 5: 21-33 is the basic key to marital success. With putting self first any marriage is bound to fail. Yet selfless love does not come easily. It is possible in its fullest when Christ becomes our Lord and Saviour. We can experience God’s love when He gives Himself completely to us in our daily experiences, it becomes easier for us to give ourselves to others.

Many persons did not get such love from their parents or see their parents show it to each other. Nevertheless such love, where problems are existing for some time in a marriage and are causing emotional pain in either or both partners, such problems will not go away by themselves. One sign of a healthy marriage is that partners will seek help when necessary. It is hoped that these suggestions will be helpful to you both.

Have a fulfilling marriage!

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