

# Session 1 – Strengthening Connection

## CONVERSATION 1

5 minutes



### THE FIRST TIME YOU MET

Tell each other your strongest memory of the first time you met and what first attracted you to one another.

## Tending a vineyard

Four analogies for tending a marriage:

### 1. Adjusting

The early years of marriage require a lot of adjustment.

*We can change ourselves;  
we can't change our partner.*

### 2. Pruning

As life gets busier, a key skill in marriage is prioritising our relationship (pruning back certain areas of our lives in order to prioritise another).

There may be pressures on our time from children, work or other demands on us.

*We will only survive as a couple if we learn to prioritise our marriage relationship over every other demand on our time.*



### 3. Supporting

Marriages need a support network (eg, friends and family).

We may face challenges from illness, infertility, finances, empty nest, elderly parent(s).

Supporting and encouraging each other is essential.

When we support each other, the very challenges we face can draw us closer together.

### 4. Renewing

Being prepared to talk about our own individual needs and desires.

Sharing with our partner our hopes for our future together.

Slowing down for long enough to decide on changes we'd like to make.

Possibly stopping certain activities in order to have more time together.

Starting something new that will strengthen or restore or renew the connection between us.



If you're struggling in your marriage,  
we want to encourage you that reconnecting  
is possible.

When couples have tended their relationship,  
things have changed dramatically and  
they go on to experience a new connection  
and intimacy.

## CONVERSATION 2

5 minutes



### WORKING THROUGH CHALLENGES

- Talk about any pressures and challenges you've worked through together in the past.
- What are the main pressures either or both of you are facing currently?
- Ask your partner, 'In what ways could I support you in working through this challenge?'

### CONVERSATION 3

30 minutes



#### REVIEWING YOUR CONNECTION

Read through the list of statements and, using the scale below, write in the box the number that you feel corresponds to your viewpoint. Please do it on your own. When you have finished, follow the instructions on the opposite page.

0. never true 1. rarely true 2. occasionally true 3. usually true 4. always true

#### I feel that...

- 1. We give each other our undivided attention
- 2. We understand and support each other's beliefs and values
- 3. We show each other affection through demonstrative non-sexual touching
- 4. We are able to apologise and forgive when one of us has hurt the other
- 5. We listen to each other's point of view even when we disagree
- 6. We are able to talk about our sexual hopes and desires
- 7. We are able to talk about our hopes and dreams for the future
- 8. We are good at encouraging each other in what we each do
- 9. We make it a priority to go out together at least once a fortnight
- 10. We reflect on the good things we enjoy as a couple
- 11. We are able to talk about strong emotions such as excitement, hope, grief and anxiety
- 12. We are sensitive towards each other's sexual needs
- 13. We encourage each other's spiritual growth
- 14. We are good at meeting each other's emotional needs
- 15. We agree on our sexual practices
- 16. We discuss new ideas with each other
- 17. We support each other in the goals we have for our family life
- 18. We have a number of joint interests that we pursue together
- 19. We are both happy about the frequency of our lovemaking
- 20. We are good at listening to each other's feelings without interrupting or criticising

### Results of reviewing your connection

1. Add up your scores from the statements on the opposite page as follows:

Statements about:	My score	Partner's score
<b>Your friendship</b> (statements 4, 8, 9, 14, 18)		
<b>Your communication</b> (statements 1, 5, 11, 16, 20)		
<b>Your physical relationship</b> (statements 3, 6, 12, 15, 19)		
<b>Your future together</b> (statements 2, 7, 10, 13, 17)		

2. Now discuss what you have each put, including any differences in your scores (the idea is to be understood by and to understand each other better).
3. Write something for each area that **you** could do to increase your scores:

**Our friendship:**

For example: *'I recognise the need for us to spend time together on our own.'*

**Our communication:**

For example: *'I obviously need to show you that I am interested in what you say.'*

**Our physical relationship:**

For example: *'I would like to be more sensitive towards your sexual desires.'*

**Our future together:**

For example: *'I would like to find a good time for us to have a conversation about our plans for the future.'*

When you have both finished, show each other what you have put.

# Make time for each other

Making time for the people that matter most in our lives doesn't just happen; it requires a conscious decision to make it happen. If a relationship is to thrive and keep growing, we must have regular quality time together.

The benefits of a weekly date:

- keeps the fun and romance alive in our relationship
- deepens our understanding and appreciation of each other
- ensures we communicate regularly on a meaningful level

Plan to spend one to two hours alone together each week to rekindle romance, have fun and talk together about your feelings (your hopes, fears, worries, excitements).

It doesn't need to be expensive.

**Golden rule:**  
**Never change your date without consulting your partner.**

## How to make a weekly date happen:

**Plan it** into your calendar as you would a business appointment or social engagement

**Prioritise it** over all other activities (work, friends, sport, TV, children)

**Protect it** from external demands and pressures on your time, whether people, phones, social media

By doing so, we're saying to each other,  
'You're the most important person to me,  
and I'm giving you my full attention.'

### CONVERSATION 4

5 minutes



### SPECIAL TIMES TOGETHER

Tell your partner what have been the most special times you have shared together as a couple. Be specific. Talk about where and when those times were and what you were doing. Explain why they were special to you.

# Nurture each other

Nurturing involves seeking to meet each other's emotional needs for affection, encouragement, support, comfort, etc.

It's as though there's an empty space inside that needs to be filled up with another person's love and attention.

- when we're known intimately, when we're loved by another, we are no longer alone; the space inside is filled up
- the way to keep filling this space inside is by recognising and meeting each other's emotional needs

**We are made for close relationships and we all have a longing to be known and to be loved by another person.**

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*The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'*

– GENESIS 2:18



## How to nurture each other

In marriage we can either be reactive or proactive:

- being reactive is when we focus on each other's shortcomings
- being proactive involves focusing on each other's needs

Proactive behaviour draws us together because each of us feels loved. When we feel loved, we feel like loving.

Study each other and recognise each other's needs. Often our partner's needs and desires will be different to our own.

We can't assume our partner automatically knows our desires. We must tell each other.

**Discover what matters to your partner.  
Otherwise, we tend to give what we like  
to receive.**

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*Husbands... live with your wives in an understanding way.*

– 1 PETER 3:7 (NASB)

## CONVERSATION 5

10 minutes



### KNOWING ME, KNOWING YOU

Please read through the list on the opposite page.

1. In column A, tick the three that matter most to you (that is, what you would most like your partner to give to you).
  
2. In column B, tick the three that you believe matter most to your partner (this is, what you think they would most like to receive from you).  
NB: There is some overlap between the different desires – put those three which most clearly express your preferences.
  
3. When you have both finished, exchange your responses and see how well you understand your partner:
  - How close were you to selecting the three that matter most to your partner?
  - How many of the same desires did you and your partner put for yourselves? 0, 1, 2 or 3?
  - Consider which, if any, of the list of desires you tend to give least to your partner. Are these any of the three that matter most to your partner?

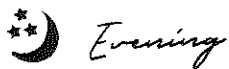
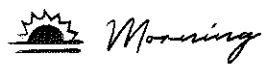
Session 1 – Strengthening Connection

	A Myself (choose 3)	B My partner (choose 3)
<b>Affirmation</b> – being appreciated for who you are by your partner		
<b>Approval</b> – being commended for those things you have done well		
<b>Companionship</b> – doing things together and sharing experiences		
<b>Conversation</b> – talking together about issues of interest and importance		
<b>Encouragement</b> – being inspired to keep going through your partner’s words		
<b>Openness</b> – being confident of your partner’s honesty about every aspect of their lives, including their feelings and ideas		
<b>Physical affection</b> – the communication of care and closeness through physical touch		
<b>Practical help</b> – experiencing your partner’s help in big or small tasks		
<b>Presents</b> – receiving tangible expressions of love and thoughtfulness		
<b>Respect</b> – having your ideas and opinions considered and valued by your partner		
<b>Security</b> – facing the future confident of your partner’s commitment to love you and stay with you		
<b>Sexual intimacy</b> – having regular opportunities to express and receive love through your sexual relationship		
<b>Support</b> – knowing your partner is working with you to fulfil your goals		
<b>Time together</b> – knowing your partner has set aside time to be with you on a regular basis		
<b>Understanding</b> – knowing your partner is aware of what matters to you		
<b>Undivided attention</b> – focusing on each other to the exclusion of any distractions		

### Plan a date together

Be creative: your date doesn't have to look like anybody else's.

Experiment with different times. When could you have a date this week?



Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

The thing that initially attracted me to you was...

(Complete in your partner's journal)



What interests do you have in common?

For example: *visiting art galleries, playing a sport, exploring new places, going to the cinema.*



It may be helpful to think back to some of the things you did when you first got together.

Is there a new interest that you could try doing together?

Think creatively around a new activity, or a sport, or a hobby you could take up together.

What do you enjoy doing separately?

Talk about whether you are allowing each other enough space to pursue these separate interests.

What I love about going on a date with you is...

For example: *time for deeper conversations, having fun, catching up on each other's news, getting to know you better.*



What could potentially prevent us having a weekly date?



Complete the following in your partner's journal

My dream date would be:



---

Save

---

Spend

---

Splurge

**Conversation starter on your next date:**

Look back to 'Knowing me, Knowing you' on pages 18–19 and ask each other, 'What could I do to meet your top three desires this week?'





# Session 2 – The Art of Communication

We all have a deep longing for emotional connection; it is a fundamental human need.

Emotional connection in marriage will only be achieved where there is good communication.

## Effective communication

Different levels of communication

Level 1: Passing on information

Level 2: Sharing our ideas and opinions

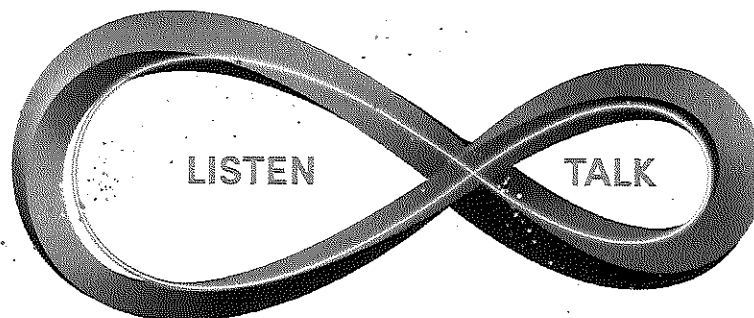
Level 3: Being open about our feelings and needs

Level 3 takes vulnerability and requires trust.

Effective communication involves speaking and listening well.

Good communication is multilayered; it involves

- our words
- our tone of voice
- our body language



**Our aim in marriage should be to listen twice as much as we talk.**

What I love about going on a date with you is...

For example: *time for deeper conversations, having fun, catching up on each other's news, getting to know you better.*



What could potentially prevent us having a weekly date?



Complete the following in your partner's journal

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**Conversation starter on your next date:**

Look back to 'Knowing me, Knowing you' on pages 18–19 and ask each other, 'What could I do to meet your top three desires this week?'





## CONVERSATION 1

10 minutes



### A SIGNIFICANT MEMORY

- Take it in turns to spend one minute telling your partner about a happy, or some other significant, memory of something that happened to you before you met.
- As you're talking, be sure to express what you felt as you recall this memory. Don't just describe the facts.
- When it is your turn to listen, summarise what you have heard, taking particular care to describe your partner's feelings. This will show you have been listening and empathising with what your partner feels about this memory.

## The importance of talking

Important to tell each other our thoughts and feelings

- we may have been taught to hide our feelings during our upbringing
- some people have difficulty recognising what they are feeling (if this describes you, please see the Continuing Conversation 'Identifying Emotions', page 38)
- it takes courage and practice to learn how to talk about feelings
- if your partner finds this hard, help them to feel safe enough to open up

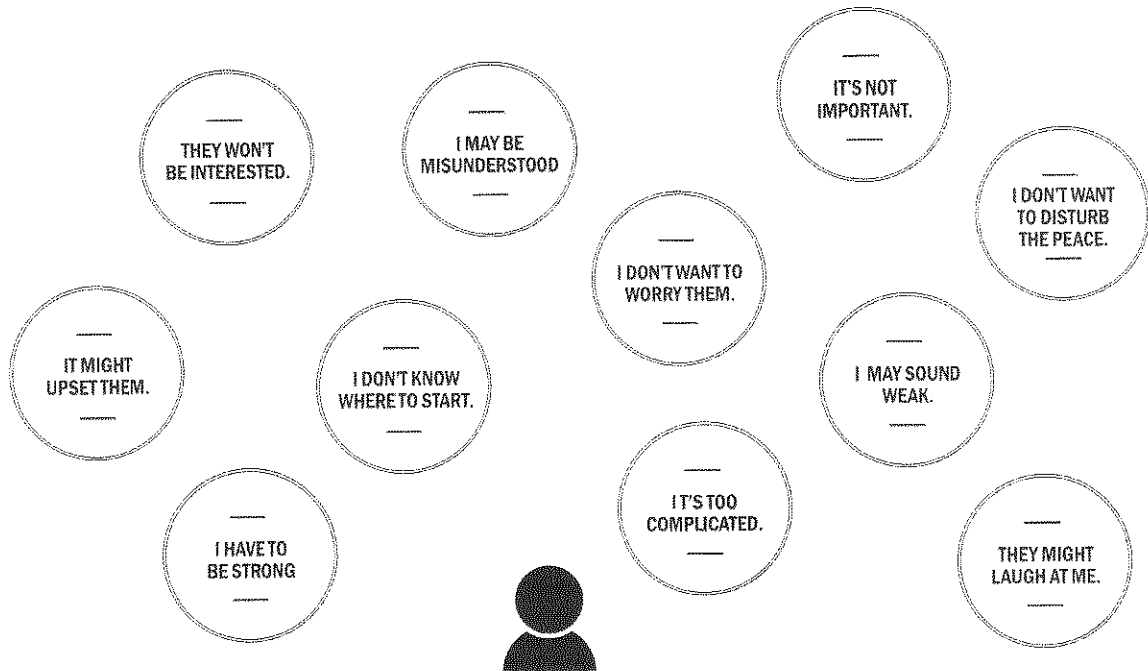
## CONVERSATION 2

5 minutes



### BARRIERS TO TALKING

Take a few minutes to look together at the diagram below and tell each other if any of these barriers apply to you.



Does anything else stop you from opening up and talking?



# The importance of listening

Good listening is one of the most important skills to learn for a strong marriage

- listening has great power to make our husband or wife feel loved and valued

Research indicates that the average individual only listens for 17 seconds before interrupting.

## CONVERSATION 3

5 minutes



### THE POWER OF LISTENING

Discuss the following questions as a couple:

- How do you feel when you are listened to?
- How do you feel when you are not listened to?
- To whom would you go if you needed a listening ear?
- What makes that person a good listener?

There is no one who is more important to listen to than our husband or wife.

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*Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.*

- PROVERBS 18:13, NLT

# Hindrances to listening

## Five bad listening habits

**1. Disengaging**

When we have a separate conversation going on in our head or we're not listening properly because of our physical environment.

**2. Reassuring**

Not allowing our partner to voice negative emotions.

**3. Giving advice**

Focusing on solutions rather than empathising with our partner.

**4. Going off on a tangent**

Taking over the conversation with our own agenda.

**5. Interrupting**

Failing to let our partner finish what they want to say.

These habits can prevent the speaker from saying what they're feeling, which may eventually cause them to shut down.

We need to listen first before coming in with our contribution.

We can all learn the art of effective listening, but it takes time and requires us to be intentional.

### CONVERSATION 4

5 minutes

*Identifying bad listening habits*

#### IDENTIFYING BAD HABITS

Take a few moments to identify your own bad listening habit(s).

Check to see if your partner agrees!



## Five steps for reflective listening

### 1. Try to put yourself in your partner's shoes

Put your own views to one side and really appreciate what it's like for your partner to be feeling the way that they do. Allow your partner to finish what they are saying. Maintain eye contact and do not do something else at the same time. Do not rush them and do not be afraid of silences.

### 2. Acknowledge what they've said

When you have listened to what your partner wants to say, reflect back what they said without deflection or interpretation. At this stage you're not agreeing or disagreeing or giving your own opinion. (Your turn will come later.)

### 3. Find out what is most important

Then ask your husband or wife: 'What is the most important part of what you have been saying?' Wait quietly while your partner thinks about what they want to say. When they have spoken, reflect back again what you have heard.

### 4. Help them work out what they might do

Now ask: 'Is there anything you would like to do (or, if appropriate, like me or us to do) about what you have said?' Again give your partner time to think quietly. When they have finished, reflect back what your partner has said, enabling them to hear their own ideas.

### 5. Ask if your partner has said all they need to

Don't assume you already know everything your partner wants to say. If there is more, reflect this back too.

So often we think being a good conversationalist is all about having interesting views or fascinating stories to tell. But asking the right questions is what enables deep conversation.

'Reflecting back' has two benefits: It helps us find out if we've really understood what our partner has told us and it helps them know if they've been understood... Reflecting back may feel awkward or contrived, but it works!

## CONVERSATION 5

30 minutes



### REFLECTIVE LISTENING


Each of you pick an issue currently upsetting or bothering you that you have not discussed recently. At this point, choose an issue where there has not already been a lot of disagreement and conflict. It could be an area of concern related to work, holidays, children, your home, etc.

- The speaker should hold a table napkin (or something similar). This is to remind you whose issue is being discussed.
- The speaker tells the listener about the issue and how they feel about it (do not go on for too long). The listener listens and then reflects back.
- Then the listener asks, 'What is the most important aspect of what you are saying?' The speaker responds. The listener listens and then reflects back again.
- The listener then asks, 'Is there anything you would like to do (or, if appropriate, like me / us to do) about what you have just said?' Again the listener listens and then reflects back.
- Finally, the listener asks, 'Is there anything more that you would like to say?' The listener listens and then reflects back again.


Then switch roles so you both have a chance to speak and to listen.

This conversation is good practice for all of us, both in talking about our feelings and in listening to each other.

**Plan a date together**

 *Morning*

 *Afternoon*

 *Evening*

<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tue</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thurs</i>	<i>Fri</i>	<i>Sat</i>	<i>Sun</i>

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

This week you made me feel valued when you...



**Conversation starters on your next date:**

Ask your partner: When did you last feel... [pick a word]...



encouraged?

|

discouraged?

understood?

|

misunderstood?

rejected?

|

fully accepted?

Write down some other questions as conversation starters:

For example: *What was the best holiday you've ever had?*

When and where do you have your best conversations?



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**How good is your communication?**



1. Areas in our relationship where I feel that we communicate effectively...
2. Things we don't talk about much that I wish we talked about more...
3. Things that we do not talk about at all...

Then, pick an area of your marriage that you haven't discussed in any depth and follow the steps for the Conversation 5, 'Reflective listening' (page 33). Please ensure that both of you are ready to do this.

Take it in turns to be the speaker and the listener.

Don't worry if it feels awkward or contrived at first. Try to follow the steps and recognise how different it feels really listening to your partner and how it feels to be listened to by them.

Some of you may experience a strong emotional reaction to what your partner is saying. Still, try to hear them out and reflect back what they say.

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*Please turn over*



## Identifying Emotions



To help those who struggle to identify what they are feeling.

### 1. **Completing the partial sentences below will help you identify your emotions and become more emotionally aware.**

Quickly add a few words to describe your feelings (either positive or negative) for each sentence. The lists to the right will help you to get started.

When we set off on holiday, I feel...

When we go out with friends, I feel...

When I'm in a room with people I don't know, I feel...

When I'm with my parents, I feel...

When I think of past successes, I feel...

When I think of mistakes I've made, I feel...

When I think of the future, I feel...

When I think of relating to God, I feel...

When my husband / wife tells me he / she loves me, I feel...

When my husband / wife and I have a disagreement, I feel...

When my husband / wife tells me something I've done that's disappointed or hurt him / her, I feel...

When my husband / wife apologises to me, I feel...

### 2. **Complete the following sentences**

I feel most loved when...

I get angry when...

I feel happiest when...

I feel rejected when...

Now show your partner what you have put.

**Positive emotions**

accepted	<input type="checkbox"/>	forgiven	<input type="checkbox"/>	relieved	<input type="checkbox"/>
affirmed	<input type="checkbox"/>	free	<input type="checkbox"/>	respected	<input type="checkbox"/>
appreciated	<input type="checkbox"/>	grateful	<input type="checkbox"/>	safe	<input type="checkbox"/>
calm	<input type="checkbox"/>	happy	<input type="checkbox"/>	secure	<input type="checkbox"/>
capable	<input type="checkbox"/>	hopeful	<input type="checkbox"/>	supported	<input type="checkbox"/>
carefree	<input type="checkbox"/>	humbled	<input type="checkbox"/>	sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
comforted	<input type="checkbox"/>	joyful	<input type="checkbox"/>	trusting	<input type="checkbox"/>
confident	<input type="checkbox"/>	loved	<input type="checkbox"/>	understood	<input type="checkbox"/>
content	<input type="checkbox"/>	liberated	<input type="checkbox"/>	valuable	<input type="checkbox"/>
delighted	<input type="checkbox"/>	peaceful	<input type="checkbox"/>	worthwhile	<input type="checkbox"/>
encouraged	<input type="checkbox"/>	positive	<input type="checkbox"/>		
excited	<input type="checkbox"/>	relaxed	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**Negative emotions**

abandoned	<input type="checkbox"/>	embarrassed	<input type="checkbox"/>	resentful	<input type="checkbox"/>
afraid	<input type="checkbox"/>	exposed	<input type="checkbox"/>	sad	<input type="checkbox"/>
angry	<input type="checkbox"/>	frustrated	<input type="checkbox"/>	scared	<input type="checkbox"/>
anxious	<input type="checkbox"/>	guilty	<input type="checkbox"/>	sorrowful	<input type="checkbox"/>
annoyed	<input type="checkbox"/>	humiliated	<input type="checkbox"/>	unappreciated	<input type="checkbox"/>
apologetic	<input type="checkbox"/>	hurt	<input type="checkbox"/>	unloved	<input type="checkbox"/>
ashamed	<input type="checkbox"/>	insecure	<input type="checkbox"/>	upset	<input type="checkbox"/>
bored	<input type="checkbox"/>	insignificant	<input type="checkbox"/>	used	<input type="checkbox"/>
confused	<input type="checkbox"/>	jealous	<input type="checkbox"/>	useless	<input type="checkbox"/>
cross	<input type="checkbox"/>	lonely	<input type="checkbox"/>	vulnerable	<input type="checkbox"/>
defeated	<input type="checkbox"/>	misunderstood	<input type="checkbox"/>	weak	<input type="checkbox"/>
depressed	<input type="checkbox"/>	nervous	<input type="checkbox"/>		
disappointed	<input type="checkbox"/>	numb	<input type="checkbox"/>		
disgusted	<input type="checkbox"/>	overwhelmed	<input type="checkbox"/>		
disrespected	<input type="checkbox"/>	pressured	<input type="checkbox"/>		
dissatisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	rejected	<input type="checkbox"/>		

# Session 3 – Resolving Conflict

Conflict is inevitable in every marriage – all couples disagree. It doesn't mean we have married the wrong person or that the relationship is doomed to failure.

We come into marriage with different backgrounds, desires, priorities and personalities

- it's no good trying to force our partner to do things our way
- with the right tools, addressing the conflict can strengthen the relationship
- in marriage, we are on the same side, the same team

We need to ask ourselves, 'Are there ways I need to change for the sake of our partnership?'

## Four principles for handling conflict

### 1. Remember your partner's positive qualities

Continue to show appreciation for what you love (and admire) about your partner (even while you may disagree passionately about various issues).

The more we concentrate on the things we appreciate about each other, the more appreciative we become of each other.

Make it a daily habit.

**No marriage can survive a lack of respect, a lack of positive, encouraging words being spoken to each other.**

## CONVERSATION 1

10 minutes



### SHOWING APPRECIATION

Write down six things you appreciate about your partner. (Be specific: it may be thanking them for what they do, or it may be expressing your appreciation for who they are – try to make it a mixture – looking particularly for things you may have come to take for granted.)

For example: *'I love the way you get on so well with other people.'* *'I love the way you're so affectionate towards me.'* *'Thank you for working so hard to provide for our family.'* *'Thank you for making our home such a welcoming place to be.'* *'I really appreciate it that you fill the car up with fuel.'*

1.

*Ich liebe es, wie du dich mit anderen Leuten verhältst.*

2.

3.

*Ich liebe es, wie du dich um unsere Familie kümmerst.*

4.

*Ich liebe es, wie du dich um unsere Wohnung kümmerst.*

5.

*Ich liebe es, wie du dich um unsere Wohnung kümmerst.*

6.

*Ich liebe es, wie du dich um unsere Wohnung kümmerst.*

*Ich liebe es, wie du dich um unsere Wohnung kümmerst.*

When you have both finished, show each other what you have put.

## 2. Recognise that differences are good

Don't try to change each other.

Learn to accept differences of temperament, personality, upbringing and values.

Maintain a sense of humour.

**See your marriage as a partnership in which you combine your strengths and support each other's weaknesses.**

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*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you...*

– ROMANS 15:7

## CONVERSATION 2

10 minutes



### RECOGNISING YOUR DIFFERENCES

Mark against each issue where on the line your partner's and your own preferences each lie, eg (N = Nicky; S = Sila)

ISSUE	PREFERENCE	
Money	S Spend	N Save
Punctuality	S Have time in hand	N Cut it fine
Clothes	Casual	Formal
Disagreements	Thrash it out	Keep the peace
Holidays	Seek adventure	Seek rest
Money	Spend	Save
People	Time with others	Time alone
Phone	Talk at length	Only for making arrangements
Planning	Make plans and stick to them	Be spontaneous/go with the flow
Punctuality	Have time in hand	Cut it fine
Relaxation	Go out	Be at home
Sleeping	Go to bed late	Get up early
Sports	Enthusiast	Uninterested
Tidiness	Keep everything tidy/under control	Be relaxed and live in a mess
TV	Keep it on	Throw it out

Show each other what you have put. Then find one issue where your differences can be a source of strength for your relationship.

### 3. Look for an 'us' solution

#### Recognise bad times to discuss disagreements.



#### The 10 o'clock rule

The 10 o'clock rule can be called into play by either you or your partner if you are having an argument late in the evening. It means the argument has to be paused and postponed until a better time.

#### Five practical steps:

##### 1. Focus on the issue

- move the issue from between you and put it in front of you
- discuss the issue rather than attacking each other

##### 2. Use 'I' statements

- avoid labelling ('You always...', 'You never...')
- describe your feelings ('I feel undervalued when...')

##### 3. Listen to each other

- take it in turns to talk (the speaker holds something, as described in Session 2, to indicate whose turn it is)

##### 4. Brainstorm possible solutions

- make a list if necessary

##### 5. Decide on the best solution for now and review later

- if it's not working, try another solution from your list

If you've realised that anger is an issue for you, don't be afraid to seek help. Ask your course leader for information about where to find this.

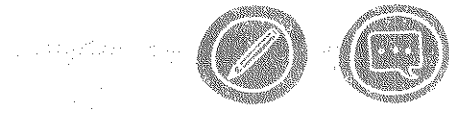
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*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye, and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?... first take the plank out of your own eye and then you'll see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye.*

– MATTHEW 7:3,5

### CONVERSATION 3

30 minutes



#### USING THE FIVE STEPS

##### 1. Identify the best times and the worst times to discuss disagreements.

Our best times are.....

Our worst times are.....

##### 2. Tell your partner which of the five steps you think is the most important for you.

##### 3. Each choose an issue which causes, or could potentially cause, conflict between you.

My issue:

Your issue:

##### 4. Taking one issue at a time, take it in turns to express your point-of-view.

The one speaking should hold something, such as a handkerchief, to remind you whose turn it is.



**5. Choose one of the issues**

Together brainstorm some possible solutions.

(Don't rule out any at this stage. Be aware some may involve one or both of you making a change.)

Choose the best solution for now...

Agree to review the solution in.....weeks.

**6. Take the other issue**

Together brainstorm some possible solutions.

Choose the best solution for now...

Agree to review the solution in.....weeks.

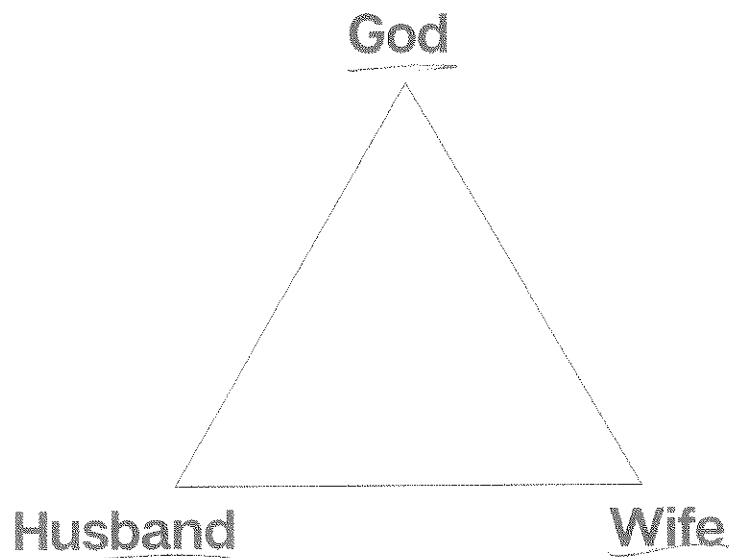
#### 4. Support your partner

When we expect our partner to meet all our needs, we inevitably fail each other and get hurt, causing our marriage to spiral downwards.

Focus more on meeting your partner's needs rather than expecting them to meet yours.

Ask your partner, 'How can I make your day better?'

When we look to God to meet our needs for unconditional love, we are able to focus more easily on each other's needs (see diagram below).



This describes a husband and wife with God at the centre of their relationship. To find out more about the Christian faith, consider doing Alpha together – go to [alpha.org](http://alpha.org) to find out more.

---

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*

– PSALM 46:1

**Praying for each other helps us connect on a regular basis**

- five to ten minutes a day is generally better than one hour every month
- ask each other, 'What can I pray for you today?'
- draw on God's promises from the Bible and start with thankfulness
- the closer each of us is individually in our relationship with God, the closer we will be to each other as husband and wife as in the triangle diagram opposite
- if one of you has upset the other, say sorry and forgive each other before praying

“

**A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.**

ECCLESIASTES 4:12

**If you don't pray, find other ways to support each other on a daily basis**

**CONVERSATION 4**

5 minutes



**SUPPORTING EACH OTHER**

Ask your partner if there's something they're concerned about at the moment. Then, if you're comfortable praying, pray for each other – aloud or silently. Otherwise, express your support in some other way.

What could you do daily to connect and support your partner more?



## Plan a date together



Morning



Afternoon



Evening

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

What could you do to make your partner feel like he / she is the most important person to you?



### Conversation starter on your next date:

Talk about when you have laughed together the most and how you can deliberately create more times of laughing together.



---

This week I plan to...

(Write in something kind you could do to make your partner's week better.)



---

Which of the differences between us is most obviously complementary?



When is a good time / where is a good place to discuss issues that cause us conflict?



The main issue that causes conflict for us is around...



**Appendix 1 contains additional conversations to address specific areas of conflict. Go to the relevant page(s) for your area(s) of conflict:**

Money and possessions: page 146

Household chores: page 149

How you spend your free time: page 152

Parenting: page 155

---



# Session 4 – The Power of Forgiveness

Saying sorry and forgiving each other are vital because we will all hurt our partner.

The hurt must be healed if our marriage is to flourish.

Unresolved hurt will undermine the trust and openness between us and destroy our intimacy.

## Reactions to hurt

### Anger

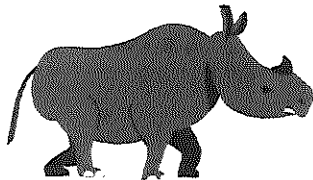
Anger is not bad in itself – it has a God-given purpose and is part of our internal mechanism to signal something is wrong and needs to be sorted out.

But we can use anger wrongly in a number of ways.

#### Two inappropriate ways of managing our anger:

##### like rhinos

- they attack when provoked



##### like hedgehogs

- they withdraw when threatened



## CONVERSATION 1

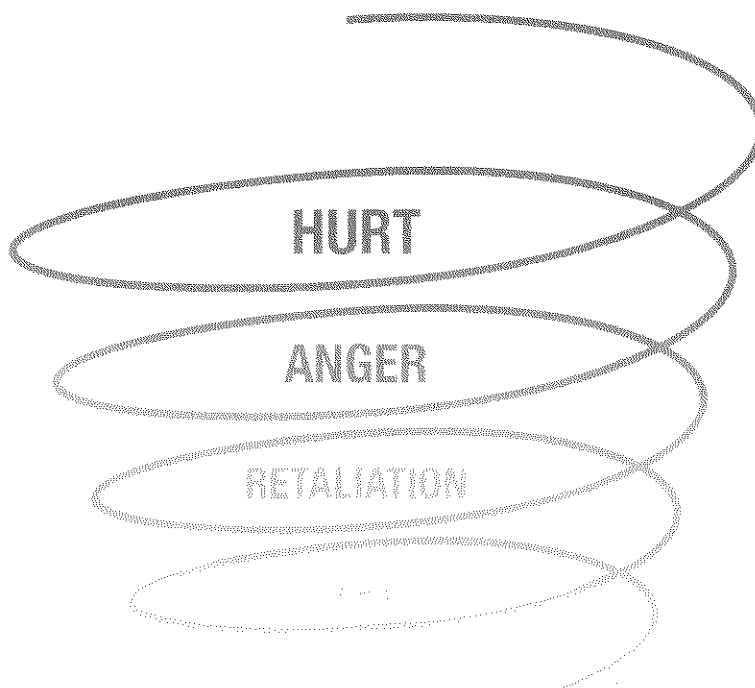
5 minutes



### RHINOS AND HEDGEHOGS

Identify whether you are more like a rhino or more like a hedgehog when you're hurt. If you're not sure, ask your partner.

Unless anger is managed properly, it leads to a downward spiral.



---

*In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.*

– EPHESIANS 4:26



“

An emotion is never buried dead –  
it is always buried alive.

SELWYN HUGHES

## What happens if hurt and anger are buried?

### Behavioural symptoms

- inability to relax
- low sexual desire
- quick temper / intolerance
- escape through drugs, alcohol, pornography, etc
- escape into work / children / religious activities etc

### Physical symptoms

- disturbed sleep
- appetite affected
- medical conditions eg: ulcers, high blood pressure, pain

### Emotional symptoms

- loss of positive emotions eg: romance, love, joy
- low self-esteem / depression
- shut down
- fear of confrontation

Do you notice any of these symptoms in yourself from burying hurt and anger?



## CONVERSATION 2

15 minutes



### HANDLING ANGER

The purpose of this conversation is to help you recognise how each of you typically responds when you feel hurt and how you display anger.

1. Put a number between 0 and 4 in the box against each statement to indicate how true it is for you. Then add up columns A and B.

0. never | 1. rarely | 2. sometimes | 3. often | 4. always

#### When I'm hurt, I...

	A	B
1. Keep the peace at any price	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Overreact and go on the attack	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Fail to admit I am angry / hurt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Apologise because I must have caused it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Become controlling and bossy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Give my partner the silent treatment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Am quick to blame others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Retaliate by becoming confrontational	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Withdraw or shut down emotionally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Want to run away and hide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Lose control / become explosive by shouting / slamming doors, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Say things I later regret	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Try to ignore my feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Become cold and clinical or sarcastic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Say things to hurt my partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Withhold physical affection / sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Demand immediate discussion of issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Hurl accusations to take the focus off my responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Feel I don't have a right to be angry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Bring up past hurt not related to the issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Total for each column</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

My score

Partner's score

**Column A = Rhino behaviour**

**Column B = Hedgehog behaviour**

Now look at each other's scores and discuss them, especially your differences.

2. At times of disagreement, what words or phrases are you aware that you use, if any, that hurt your partner?
3. What words or phrases does your partner use, if any, that hurt you?  
*(This question is especially important if either or both of you recognise that you react like the rhino.)*
4. At times of disagreement, are you and your partner able to express your views and feelings?  
*Yes, we are able to express our views and feelings.*
5. If not, how could you help your partner to do so?  
*By listening to each other's views and feelings.*  
*(This question is especially important if either or both of you recognise that you react like the hedgehog.)*

# Process for healing hurt

## 1. Talk about the hurt

Whether you have hurt your partner or have been hurt by them, take the initiative to bring it out into the open so things can be healed.

Small hurts, if left unaddressed, can build up like small stones, which eventually block a drain.

“

If... you suddenly remember a grudge [your partner] has against you... leave immediately, go to [your partner] and make things right.

MATTHEW 5:23-24, MSG

“

If [your partner] offends you, go and tell them – work it out between the two of you.

MATTHEW 18:15, MSG

## 2. Say sorry

Take responsibility – resist the urge to make excuses or to blame your partner

**Making excuses / blaming our partner:** *'I know I criticised you in front of the children yesterday, but I wouldn't have done so if you hadn't made us late.'*

**Proper apology:** *'I hurt you by criticising you in front of the children yesterday; it was unkind of me. I am sorry.'*

**Making excuses / blaming our partner:** *'I know I was grumpy and rude towards you last night, but you don't understand what intense pressure I've been under at work for the last two weeks.'*

**Proper apology:** *'It was selfish and insensitive of me to be rude and grumpy towards you last night. I am sorry to have hurt you.'*

Find out how serious the hurt is for your partner

- use the 'Richter Scale' of hurt.
- ask, 'Is this a one or a two level of hurt for you, or is it a nine or a ten?'

Confessing to God and receiving his forgiveness helps us to see the effect of our actions.

Apologising opens the way for reconciliation and healing.

A true apology doesn't make excuses.

### CONVERSATION 3

30 minutes



#### IDENTIFYING UNRESOLVED HURT

This conversation concentrates particularly on identifying the areas of hurt and seeking to understand each other's feelings better. The Continuing Conversation that follows this session focuses on apology and forgiveness.

##### Part 1 – Try to identify your partner's hurt

Think about ways in which you have hurt your partner and affected your marriage that have not been resolved between you. Think back to when you were going out, when you were engaged and early times in your marriage, as well as recent times. (None of us is perfect.) Ask yourself:

- What have I failed to do that I should be doing?
- What have I done (or am I doing) that I should not do?
- Where have I failed to meet my partner's needs?
- What have I said that has been hurtful?
- What have I left unsaid that could have shown love and encouragement?

##### Write a list of the things that come to mind. Be specific.

(For example: *'I have stopped being affectionate and rejected your initiatives to make love; I have fallen asleep in front of the television instead of talking with you; I have been out more consistently with work colleagues or friends than we have together as a couple; I said some very unkind things during that big argument we had two weeks ago about money.'*)

## Part 2 – Identify your own hurt

Identify the ways in which you have been hurt by your partner. The cause of the hurt could be recent or a long time ago. Your partner might or might not have been aware of hurting you and it could have been one incident or repeated many times. Make sure you are specific and that you describe how you felt.

Use 'I' sentences.

(For example: *'I was hurt when you didn't say anything special about my promotion; I haven't got over the fact that you lied to me on the night we first went out together; I feel frustrated because you don't discuss financial decisions with me.'*)

1. When you have both finished, exchange your lists.
2. Read silently the ways you have hurt each other.
3. One of you then 'reflect back' to your partner the reason for their hurt and the feelings it produced in them, without trying to interpret what they have written or to defend yourself. To clarify what they feel, ask questions such as, *'What did you mean by that?'* Or, *'Is there anything else you would like to say?'*
4. Then the other partner should 'reflect back' in the same way. Make sure each of you has an understanding of the feelings that are described.
5. Return the lists to each other. Then add to or revise your list of the ways you have hurt your partner. Spend some time considering every aspect of their hurt. Try to see it through your partner's eyes.
6. Through the coming week, ask God to give you new insights into why your partner feels hurt and your part in causing it.
7. It is important to complete the process of *'getting rid of bitterness, rage and anger'* (Ephesians 4:31) by apologising and forgiving if you haven't already done so. (Use the Continuing Conversation, 'Healing Unresolved Hurt' on pages 73–75 to do this if necessary.)

### 3. Forgive

Forgiveness is essential and one of the greatest forces for healing in a marriage.

Forgiveness is, first and foremost, a choice, not a feeling:

- forgiveness always costs us something
- the question is not, *'Do we feel like forgiving?'* but, *'Will we forgive? Will we let go of our self-pity / demand for justice / desire to retaliate?'*

Forgiveness IS NOT:

- pretending that the hurt doesn't matter and trying to forget about it
- denying the hurt (and just hoping it will go away)
- thinking, *'Our love for each other will somehow magically resolve any ways we hurt each other, so it doesn't matter'*

Forgiveness IS:

- facing the wrong done to us
- recognising the emotions inside
- choosing not to hold it against our partner

Forgiveness is a process – we often need to keep forgiving for the same hurt, sometimes on a daily basis.

“

**Forgiveness goes beyond human fairness: it is pardoning those things that can't readily be pardoned at all.**

– C.S. LEWIS

---

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger... Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

– EPHESIANS 4:31–32



Think of a time when you have been forgiven or when you have forgiven someone. How did it make you feel?



What do you find hardest about forgiving?

### Start again together

Begin each day with a fresh start.

Don't expect healing to be instant – apology and forgiveness remove the distance between us but the hurt leaves a bruising that needs time to heal.

Rebuild trust by setting aside some quality time together and being gentle and kind towards each other.

### CONVERSATION 4

5 minutes



### COMFORTING EACH OTHER

Ask your partner what you can do to help them with this process of healing. Then, if you feel comfortable, pray for each other – aloud or silently. Otherwise express comfort for your partner in some other way.

“

Love keeps no record of wrongs.

– 1 CORINTHIANS 13:5

---

*Confess your faults to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.*

– JAMES 5:16

## Plan a date together



Morning



Afternoon



Evening

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

This week I really appreciated it when you...



What is the most helpful response from your partner when you tell them that you are feeling hurt?



Do you find it easier to say sorry or to forgive? Why is that?



## Healing unresolved hurt



It is important to complete the process of healing any hurt between you that you identified in Session 4 on pages 66 and 67, if you haven't already done so. (Keep using the conversation below whenever you identify hurt between you in the future.)

My partner's deepest hurt happened when I.....  
(look at what you wrote on page 66)

My partner felt ridiculed / humiliated / unaffirmed / put down / criticised / rejected / unloved / undervalued / .....

From now on, I intend to.....

I intend not to.....

If appropriate, write a prayer expressing to God your regret, asking for his forgiveness and praying for his help not to repeat the behaviour that hurt your partner.

For example: *Lord, thank you that you help those who call out to you. I am so sorry for hurting my partner by.....I ask you to forgive me and to help me to change so that I do not cause them further hurt. Please heal our relationship and show me how to express love to my partner.*

*Please turn over*

Say sorry to your partner

*'I am so sorry for...*

*I know it hurts you and makes you feel...*

*From now on I intend to...*

*Please forgive me.'*

When you feel ready, express forgiveness to your partner for what they have expressed.

Say, 'I forgive you for .....

If you are finding this hard, ask God for his help. It may help to write down your prayer.

For example: *Dear Lord, thank you that you know all about me and love me. Thank you for being ready to forgive me for the ways I have hurt others. You know how hurt and angry I felt when my partner criticised me when I'd done my best. I choose to let go of my anger and resentment. I want to put my desire to retaliate into your hands, and ask you to help my partner to change. I choose to forgive him / her as you have forgiven me. Please heal the hurt with your love.*

**Comfort each other**

This is important when you have made yourselves vulnerable to each other and helps to bring healing to the hurt.

If you're comfortable praying, pray that your partner will know freedom from guilt and shame.

Then think of something you both enjoy that you could do together for a date this week to replace the negative emotions with positive ones.

---

**Conversation starter on your next date:**

Do you think that your wider family is made up of more rhinos or more hedgehogs?

How did this play out / does this play out in your wider family relationships?





# Session 5 – The Impact of Family

How would you describe your family background?



Family background has a big influence on a marriage

- for some people, the support they receive from their family is good and helpful in building a strong marriage
- for others, it's more complicated and can even be damaging

## Leaving and letting go

When we get married, a profound change should take place in our relationship with our parent or parents (or whoever were our main caregivers as we grew up)

- the change from being a child and completely dependent upon them to a healthy independence as an adult
- the significance of leaving is not so much the physical move as the psychological and emotional one
- we create a new 'centre of gravity' – our highest loyalty must be to each other

Support each other.

If necessary, put boundaries in place, not to cut yourselves off from your parents but to connect with them as a couple in a new way.

**Listen to parental advice  
but make your own decisions  
together as a couple.**

---

*For this reason a man [and a woman] will leave their father and mother and be united to [each other]...*

– GENESIS 2:24

## CONVERSATION 1

10 minutes



### CURRENT RELATIONSHIPS

- Talk about your current relationships with wider family members.
- Discuss in what ways these relationships are a source of strength and support in your marriage.
- Then see if you can identify anything that's causing tension and what changes you could make.

## Building healthy family relationships

### 1. Resolve any conflict

Use the same process as in Session 4 to unblock the drain:

- identify and talk about the main issue causing tension
- apologise when you have been wrong
- choose to forgive and move on

### 2. Consider their needs

Focusing on what irritates us pushes us apart.

Focusing on another person's needs draws us together.

It can be helpful to take the initiative with parents about things like:

- visiting them
- enabling them to see their grandchildren
- working out what holidays you might spend together
- phoning them

---

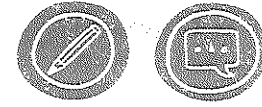
*Honour your father and your mother...*

- EXODUS 20:12



**CONVERSATION 2**

10 minutes



**SUPPORTING YOUR PARENTS**

1. How could you express your gratitude towards your parents (and / or your parents-in-law)?
  
2. How can you best keep in touch with your parents (and / or parents-in-law)? Consider telephone calls, timing and length of visits, and other ways of communicating with them.
  
3. Consider the needs of your parents and parents-in-law, or other family members. From the list below, tick the relevant boxes for their needs. Beside the boxes you have ticked, write the ways you could help meet those needs.

Husband's parent(s) (or other family members)	Needs	Wife's parent(s) (or other family members)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Advice	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Companionship	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conversation	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encouragement	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Practical help	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Security	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	..... Other Need	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	..... Other Need	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Looking at our past

We bring a mixture of experiences into our marriage from our family background:

- what was good (be grateful for that)
- what was different to our partner's experience (be aware that this can cause conflict)
- what was negative (and may be painful)

A healthy home involves providing a **secure base** from which children can explore, and a **safe haven** to which they return to have their emotional needs met.

**Buried hurt and anger from our past can come out against our partner.**

Is there anything negative from your upbringing that is influencing your relationship with your partner?



---

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

– ROMANS 12:18

### CONVERSATION 3

30 minutes



#### REFLECTING ON YOUR UPBRINGING

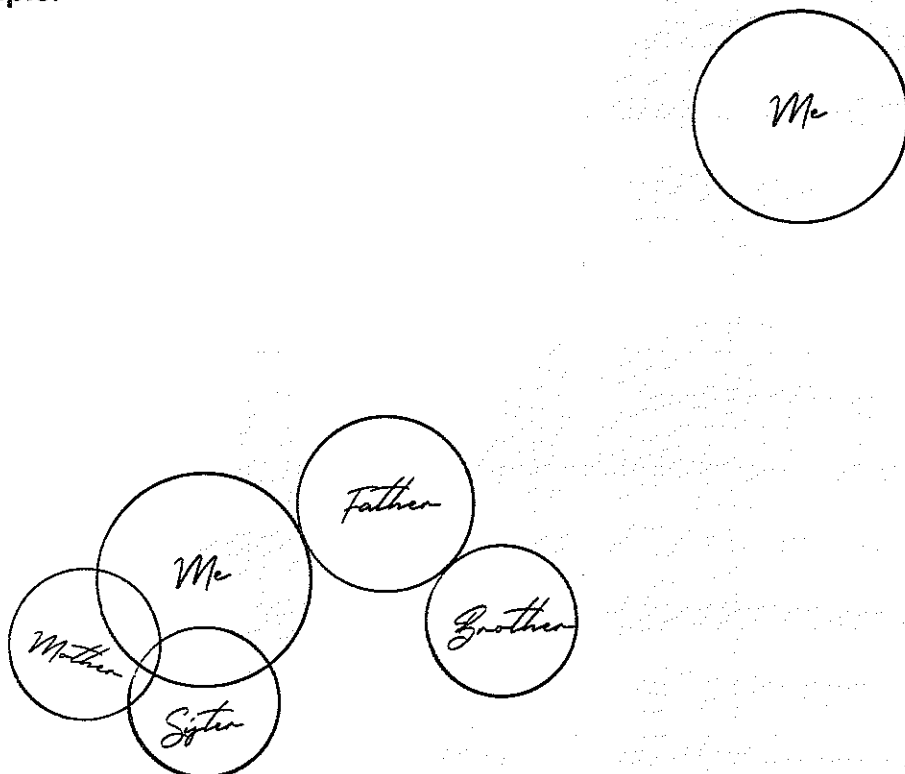
##### A. Your immediate family relationships

The big circle drawn below represents yourself. Draw circles to represent the relationship between members of your immediate family as you were growing up.

- If there was some relationship (some communication but not close), make the circles touch
- If there was a close relationship (good, open communication and conflict well resolved), overlap the circles
- If there was a lack of relationship (divorced, separated or no communication), separate the circles

Then look at each other's arrangement.

**For example:**



*Please turn over*

## B. Your parents' / step-parents' (or main caregivers') relationship with you

Please consider the following questions and tick the relevant boxes:

Did your parents or step-parents...	Mother/ Step-mother (tick if Yes)	Father/ Step-father (tick if Yes)
praise you as a child?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
meet your physical needs (for food, clothes, home, etc)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give you a sense of security?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
respect your uniqueness?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
encourage you in your development?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
set clear rules / appropriate boundaries for you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give you increasing freedom appropriate to your age?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
comfort you when you were upset?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give you presents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
take an interest in your life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
treat their children equally?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
admit their mistakes and apologise when necessary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
forgive you for your mistakes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
have realistic expectations of what was appropriate for your age?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
accept your friends?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
help you relate well to your siblings and peers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
establish clear family rules?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give discipline in a consistent, fair way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
spend ample time with you (ie, play with you, talk to you, etc)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show you physical affection (ie, hug you, kiss you, etc)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give you a sense of a 'secure base' to go out from?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
provide a 'safe haven' for you to return to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**C. Your parents' / step-parents' (or main caregivers') relationship with each other**

<b>Did your parents or step-parents...</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
have a strong loving relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show interest in each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
have fun together regularly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
spend time together on their own?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show each other physical affection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
help each other in small or big tasks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
encourage each other with praise and appreciation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show each other respect?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
communicate honestly and directly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
listen to each other without interrupting or criticising?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
resolve conflicts effectively?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
apologise to and forgive each other when appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
agree on the use of their money?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give each other presents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
have mutual interests?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show a willingness to negotiate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
remain faithful to each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Please turn over*

When you've finished A, B and C above, please discuss the following questions together:

- Can you identify aspects to be grateful for from your upbringing?
- Did you have any unmet childhood needs?
- Are you aware of these adversely affecting your marriage?
- Are you aware of benefits to your marriage / family life through imitating your parents / step-parents / main caregivers?
- Are you aware of ways you adversely affect your marriage / family life through imitating your parents / step-parents / main caregivers?

## Healing childhood pain

### 1. Grieve your own and your partner's unmet needs

You may encounter strong feelings as you do this, but recognising and admitting to yourself the hurt you've experienced can be a huge step forward.

Allow your partner to talk about what has been lost and give them the gift of your emotional support.

### 2. Forgive

Give up continuing expectations and longings of what you have wanted your parents or others to be for you.

Remember, forgiveness is an ongoing act of the will and is essential for healing.

**Forgiving someone is not condoning their actions or giving them the right to repeat what they've done. Forgiveness is about being set free from the ways they've hurt you.**

---

*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

– ROMANS 12:15

**Forgiveness can be expressed as part of a prayer:**

- nothing is beyond God's power to heal and restore
- pray for yourself and each other
- ask God to heal the sense of loss and to help you to know his love
- dwell on the promises of God in the Bible
- believe God's unconditional love for you as you are now
- do not use childhood pain as an excuse for not meeting your partner's needs

**CONVERSATION 4**

5 minutes



**COMFORTING EACH OTHER**

- If this is a hard area for your partner, ask them, 'What's the most painful part for you?'
- Reflect back what they tell you to show you're with them in this.
- Then ask your partner for one way you could support them. If you're comfortable praying, pray for each other. Otherwise, express your support in some other way.

---

*I have loved you with an everlasting love and am constant in my affection for you.*

- JEREMIAH 31:3

## Plan a date together



Morning



Afternoon



Evening

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

This week you made me smile when...



What were the positive aspects of the family you grew up in?



What were the negative aspects of the family you grew up in?

What are the big differences between your upbringings?



I am grateful to you for the ways our marriage has brought healing to childhood loss and pain...



Think about one way you can support your parents, your in-laws or another family member this week.



– For a further conversation about building healthy relationships with your wider families, turn to Appendix 3, page 161.

---

**Conversation starter on your next date:**

Tell each other your vision for the kind of relationship and family life you hope to have moving forward?



(This may be very different to the home either of you grew up in.)



# Session 6 – Good Sex

**Emotional connection creates good sex, and good sex creates a greater emotional connection.**

Sex is the ultimate body language through which we communicate our desire for our partner; for:

- closeness
- comfort
- love
- protection
- wanting to have a child together

Our sexual relationship:

- restores our emotional wellbeing, which helps us cope with the pressures of life
- expresses and deepens the 'one flesh' bond
- is dependent on the emotional connection between us

What does sex mean to you?



---

*I am my lover's and my lover is mine...*

– SONG OF SONGS 6:3

# Five secrets for keeping the spark alive

## S.P.A.R.K.

### 1. Speaking

Difficult at first because it is deeply private and requires vulnerability.

Tell each other what you enjoy – don't leave it to guesswork.

Most couples struggle with their sexual relationship at one time or another

- 40% of women and 30% of men will experience a sexual problem at some point

Don't regard any issues in your sexual relationship as 'your' issue or 'my' issue but 'our' issue.

### CONVERSATION 1

10 minutes



#### UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER

- Discuss with your partner whether you grew up with positive or negative messages about sex.
- Tell each other whether your upbringing made it easy or difficult for you to talk about your sexual relationship now.

## 2. Prioritising

Guard the physical space for your lovemaking:

- leave screens outside the bedroom
- invest in an alarm clock if necessary

Be creative:

- vary the atmosphere – soft lighting can help
- vary how you make love
- vary who takes the initiative
- approach variety with sensitivity at a mutually agreeable pace
- our attitude should be to seek to give pleasure to our partner and not just take it for ourselves

**Sex isn't just the icing on the cake of a marriage – it's an important ingredient of the cake itself.**

What creative change could you make in the bedroom to improve your sex life?



### 3. Anticipating

Our most potent and important sexual asset is our mind.

Having your own private language and private signals around sex spark thoughts that create anticipation and build desire (the best sex starts at breakfast!).

Mutually agreed periods of sexual abstinence can enhance a couple's sexual relationship.

Romance creates the setting for lovemaking.

Be sure sexual thoughts and desires are directed towards your partner.

Romance is the bridge between the everyday world of practicality and the private place of our sexual relationship.

Visit [themarriagecourse.org](http://themarriagecourse.org) to see recommended books for building a good sexual relationship and for help on issues relating to pornography addiction.

---

*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.*

– PHILIPPIANS 4:8

## CONVERSATION 2

10 minutes



### MOST ROMANTIC MOMENTS

- Tell each other what have been the most romantic moments for you in your relationship, whether that's recently or when you first met.
- Listen carefully as it will help you create romance in the future.

## 4. Responding

Sex often starts as a decision and then arousal follows.

Responding sexually can give our partner a sense of confidence and wellbeing.

Giving ourselves sexually requires a climate of trust.

What stops you from responding positively when your partner initiates sex?



---

*'...at our door is every delicacy, both new and old, that I have stored up for you, my lover.'*

– SONG OF SONGS 7:13

## 5. Kindness

Sex is about giving

- showing support in practical ways and taking time to tune in to each other's emotional needs

Men and women are wired differently when it comes to sexual arousal.

Be 'OTHER-oriented' rather than SELF-oriented'.

Our kind words will build confidence in our partner

- never criticise your spouse's natural shape
- keep telling each other what you love about their body

What is one way you could show kindness to your partner for the sake of your sexual relationship?



**There is a very strong link between building each other's self-esteem and building an intimate sexual relationship.**

---

*His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me.*

– SONG OF SONGS 2:6



**CONVERSATION 3**

30 minutes



**TALKING ABOUT SEX**

**A. Rate your lovemaking**

Circle a number for each of the five qualities – first for yourself (A) and then for your partner (B) – which you feel best describes your sexual relationship, where 1 = not so good and 5 = very good:

A. You	Qualities	B. Your partner
1 2 3 4 5	Speaking	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Prioritising	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Anticipating	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Responding	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Kindness	1 2 3 4 5

Which area(s) do you need to work on?

**B. Identify any problem areas**

1. What, if any, are the differences between you, as husband and wife, in the way you respond sexually?

Are these differences having a positive or negative effect on your marriage?

If positive, give the main reason:

If negative, give the main reason:

*Please turn over*

2. Does your self-esteem and body image affect your lovemaking negatively?

If so, explain why:

How could your partner help you?

3. What, if any, unresolved emotions (for example: *resentment, hurt, unforgiveness, anxiety or guilt*) affect your lovemaking in any way?

How could these be resolved?

4. Does your lovemaking lack excitement?

If so, what new element would you like to see introduced?

5. Does over-tiredness take a toll on the frequency of your lovemaking?

If so, identify the reason for over-tiredness:

What could re-energise you? (For example: *conversation, better communication, resolving past hurt, planning and prioritising sex, more sleep, less going out, more fun and less work*)

6. Do you feel free to talk together about your lovemaking?

If so, write down two or three things your partner has told you recently that have enhanced your lovemaking:

If the answer is no, identify some of the reasons for your difficulty:

Suggest something you would like your partner to say that you have never heard:

7. What are the main romance killers for you?

**C. Write the script**

List below the different criteria that would create good lovemaking for you.

Be specific about things such as timing, taking the initiative, anticipation, position, atmosphere, place, romance, tenderness, seduction and arousal (foreplay), afterwards. (We cannot guess each other's expectations.)

- |    |     |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6.  |
| 2. | 7.  |
| 3. | 8.  |
| 4. | 9.  |
| 5. | 10. |

**D. Seek to understand each other better**

- Once you have finished, read each other's responses to Sections A, B and C.
- Now start to talk about what the other has expressed – beginning where you feel most comfortable.
- Give each other the opportunity to ask questions about what you have written. Tell your partner what surprised you most. Ask for clarification if you do not fully understand.

# Protecting our marriage

## Practical steps to affair-proof our marriage:

### 1. Build each other up

The most common cause of affairs is a failure to meet each other's emotional needs.

It's our emotional connection with each other that ultimately maintains our sexual attraction to each other.

### 2. Set boundaries

Infidelity starts and stops in the mind.

We can't help being attracted to other people, but we can decide whether or not to entertain such thoughts.

Many affairs begin not with immediate sexual attraction but through intimate conversation.

### 3. Talk to someone

If feelings become overwhelming, tell your partner or someone else. This can help burst the bubble.

### 4. Keep sex alive

Normal to have different levels of desire at times.

Loving involves giving to each other – sometimes making an effort, sometimes showing restraint.

As we increase emotional intimacy, physical desire usually increases.

Sometimes we need go back to the basics of enjoying touching and being touched.

---

*So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith.*

– MALACHI 2:15

## CONVERSATION 4

5 minutes



### SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

- Tell your partner what was important for you in this session.
- Say sorry to each other for any ways you've spoiled your sexual intimacy and, if appropriate, express forgiveness.
- Ask your partner how you can support them this week. If you feel comfortable, pray for each other, aloud or silently. Otherwise express your support in another way.

---

*Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love it would be utterly scorned.*

– SONG OF SONGS 8:6-7

## Plan a date together



Morning



Afternoon



Evening

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

This week you made me feel so loved when you...



One thing I will change to improve our sex life...



**Emma Waring's three top tips to help you prepare for making love**

1. One of the biggest barriers to sex is tiredness. Rather than expending a lot of energy shopping and cooking, why not agree to get a takeaway one evening or order something in? This will create a sense of occasion and give you more time to prepare.
2. Consider sending flirtatious text messages to your partner, such as, 'Guess what underwear I have on.' Even if your partner is busy and can't respond in kind, they can send a short flirtatious message back, which creates fun and builds anticipation.
3. Both take a shower or bath as soon as you get home from work. This will help you to wash away the cares of the day. Then get into some comfortable clothes or nightwear to set the tone.

Plan times of making love (even if it seems contrived at first) to fulfil what you both feel comfortable with from Section C of the conversation 'Talking About Sex' (page 103). Happiness and fulfilment in this area of our marriage will depend on meeting our partner's needs, as we would like them to meet ours. Be careful not to push your partner to fulfil your desires – look to meet theirs.

**Conversation starter on your next date:**

The most romantic thing you have ever done for me is...







# Session 7 – Love in Action

Love is about more than feelings; it's about what we do – it involves action. Love always costs us something.

## The five love languages<sup>1</sup>

1. Loving words
2. Thoughtful presents
3. Physical affection
4. Quality time
5. Kind actions

For each of us, one of these 'love languages' will communicate love more effectively than the others.

Most people have different love languages to their partner.

Often we try to communicate love in the way we understand it and want to receive it.

A marriage that is full of love is where we are seeking to meet our husband or wife's needs in the particular way that makes them feel loved.

Using our partner's love language may feel unnatural and awkward initially.

<sup>1</sup> The teaching on the Five Love Languages is adapted from Dr Gary Chapman's bestselling book, *The 5 Love Languages®: The Secret to Love That Lasts* (© 2015). Published by Northfield Publishing. Used by permission.

## 1. Loving words

Words have great power either to build up or to put down our partner.

Give compliments and encourage each other daily.

Speak kindly to each other.

For some people, hearing words of affirmation feels like arriving at an oasis in a desert.

“

Words affect love. And without loving words, relationships begin to die.

ROB PARSONS, OBE

---

*Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*

– PROVERBS 16:24

## 2. Thoughtful presents

**Presents are visual symbols of love.**

Giving presents is a way of investing in our marriage

- can be inexpensive but have high value; for example: a single flower, a bar of chocolate
- don't wait only for special occasions
- actively discover what your partner likes (within your budget!)

### **CONVERSATION 1**

10 minutes



### **FAVOURITE PRESENTS**

Tell your partner what have been the best presents you've received from them. Explain why.

### 3. Physical affection

Affectionate touch is a powerful communicator of love in marriage

- if this is your partner's primary way of feeling loved, in times of crisis touch will communicate more than anything else that you care

We need to use the whole range and find out from our partner what's appropriate at different moments: holding hands, putting an arm round each other's shoulder or waist, a kiss, a hug, a hand on a hand, a back massage, sexual foreplay, making love

- both sexual and non-sexual touch are important in marriage

“

To touch my body is to touch me. To withdraw from my body is to distance yourself from me emotionally.

DR GARY CHAPMAN

### 4. Quality time

Married couples can spend a lot of time together without using it to convey love to each other.

Togetherness means more than physical proximity

- it involves focusing our attention on our partner

Quality time together builds friendship through:

**1. Talking together**

Important to share our thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, disappointments.

I need to  talk more  listen more

**2. Eating together**

Make the effort to initiate conversation.

Ask questions that the other will enjoy answering.

Our meal times would be improved if I...

**3. Having fun together**

Friendship is built around shared experiences and shared memories.

**CONVERSATION 2**

10 minutes



**TIMES TOGETHER**

Each write a list of what you have most enjoyed doing together in the past or perhaps would like to start doing together:

Show each other what you have put. Use your lists as ideas when planning your future dates.

## 5. Kind actions

This involves expressing love through serving our partner, through seeking to meet their needs in practical ways.

Find out from your partner what kind actions are most meaningful for them.

When you're both busy, ask your partner,  
'Is there something I can do to help you?'  
It doesn't always have to be fair.

---

*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

— LUKE 6:31

### Learning to love

Jesus Christ showed love in all five ways:



1. Words  
*'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.'*  
John 15:9
  
2. Time  
*'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place.'*  
Mark 6:31
  
3. Actions  
*'He poured some water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet.'*  
John 13:5
  
4. Touch  
*'Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.'*  
Luke 5:13
  
5. Presents  
*'Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted.'*  
John 6:11

**Love is not just a feeling – it requires an act of the will to meet each other's needs. We are called to imitate the love of Jesus.**

---

*My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.*

– JOHN 15:12

### CONVERSATION 3

30 minutes



#### DISCOVERING YOUR LOVE LANGUAGES

Please do questions 1 and 2 on your own and share your responses before filling in questions 4 and 5.

1. Write down up to 12 specific occasions through which you have known your partner's love for you. (It could be at any stage in your relationship – before or after marriage. These may be regular or rare events and could be deemed of major or minor significance.)

#### I have known your love for me when...

For example:

*'We sat under the stars talking about our future when we were going out.'*

*'You gave me that watch on our wedding anniversary.'*

*'You cooked a special meal for my birthday.'*

*'You said how proud you were of me when I was promoted.'*

*'You spontaneously put your arm around me when we were waiting for the film to start.'*

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.



2. Taking into consideration your answers to question 1, put the five ways of showing love in order of importance for you, where 1 = most important and 5 = least important. Then consider in which order of importance you think they come for your partner.

For you (number 1–5)	Love languages	For your partner (number 1–5)
	Loving words Thoughtful presents Physical affection Quality time Kind actions	

3. Now, compare and discuss with your partner what each of you put for questions 1 and 2.
4. Looking at your partner's number one 'love language' (ie, the most important for them), list three ways in which you could communicate love to your partner this week or this month. (Try to keep within the bounds of reality!)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

5. Looking at your partner's second 'love language' (ie, the second most important for them), list three more ways in which you could communicate love to your partner effectively this week or this month.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Go online to [www.5lovelanguages.com](http://www.5lovelanguages.com) to fill in a short questionnaire to confirm the order of importance of these love languages for you.

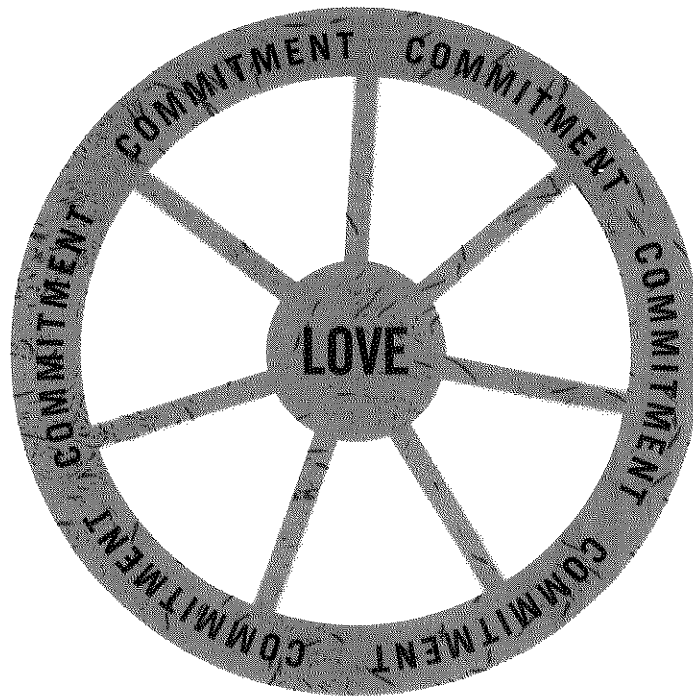
# The adventure of love for a lifetime

Marriage is a journey; it's designed to be a dynamic relationship that keeps changing and developing.

Expressing our commitment to each other is essential to the success of the journey.

Commitment is liberating as it means we can:

- take a long view
- plan our future together
- look beyond current difficulties



---

*Love does not consist of gazing at each other, but in looking together in the same direction.*

– ANTOINE DE ST EXUPÉRY

“

Every marriage is a really big commitment to the people. It's a commitment that says, 'I'm prepared not only to spend the rest of my life with you, but to spend the rest of my life finding out about you. There's always more of you to discover.'

DR ROWAN WILLIAMS (FORMER ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY)

#### CONVERSATION 4

5 minutes



#### SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

- Ask your partner if there's something particular regarding your future together for which they'd like your understanding and support.
- If you feel comfortable, say a prayer for each other, aloud or silently. Otherwise, express your support in some other way.

---

*Love and faithfulness meet together...*

– PSALM 85:10

## Plan a date together



Morning



Afternoon



Evening

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

Ideas for our dates this month...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Write in your partner's journal a kind action that you would really appreciate this week.



**Putting the course into practice**



Five things I especially want to remember and practise from  
The Marriage Course:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Show each other what you have written.

Five things you would like me to remember and practise from  
The Marriage Course? Write them below:



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**Conversation starter on your next date:**



Now we have finished the course, how can we maintain a date  
night routine?

What is the best sort of date to help us connect as a couple?

How can we make it happen?

For example: *putting boundaries around work, finding a babysitter, budgeting etc.*

