

Strengthening Your Marriage With 3 Consistent Steps

1. Prayer

As a couple, prayer is an absolute necessity to have active in your marriage. I am constantly amazed when couples state that the last time they really prayed together was years ago. Usually that rationale goes something like this, “We both pray, just not together.” Praying together is an active way to have the Lord be a part of building your marriage.

I want to talk to the men for a moment here. Men, it is your job like it or not to lead your wife spiritually and pray. I don't care if your IQ is 4 and your wife's IQ is 150, it is still your job to pray.

Prayer is your job. Like it, lump it, gripe about it, but get it done. You serve a holy God, and He will hold you accountable for your return on His investment of the precious talent—His daughter—given to you.

The structure of prayer is one of the three dailies.

2. Feelings

Emotional intimacy is a second very important aspect that a couple needs to develop and maintain throughout their relationship. Often early in the dating relationship and marriage we share feelings readily about our life situations, people, God and about our future spouse. Many of us don't know what happens to our feelings when we get married, but for many couples, they go into hiding. Life gets more complicated, and our conversations seem to get more managerial as far as getting this or that done.

Emotions are an important part of who your spouse is. As

humans, we all come with many feelings as standard equipment from our maker, so having feelings is not the problem most of us have. The limitation most couples face is the lack of skill to express them. I know I was an emotional illiterate when I was married. I had lots of feelings, but no skills at identifying or communicating them to my beautiful bride, Lisa.

This lack of skill is one of the largest hindrances to a couple's ability to start or maintain intimacy. That is why the following exercise is critical. Now I do want to warn you that this is an exercise and therefore, it does require some effort to get a degree of mastery.

Feelings Exercise

This exercise is relatively simple. You pick a feeling from the feelings list (you can get this list by emailing us). Then you place the feeling in the following sentences.

I feel _____ when _____.

I first remember feeling _____ when _____.

Let me give you two examples:

Example 1: I feel *adventurous* taking my wife and two children hiking up the mountains in Colorado Springs.

I first remember feeling *adventurous* when I was about 13 or so when my mom bought me a low-speed bike, and I rode it all over town.

Example 2: I feel *calm* when I can get alone, usually in nature, and sit still for a short while.

I first remember feeling *calm* when I was first taken out of foster homes, and my mom gave me a stuffed animal that I would sleep with.

I think you can get the idea. In the first sentence, you place whatever feeling you choose and give a present-tense example of the feeling. In the second sentence, you place an early experience, usually in childhood or adolescence.

The guidelines to the feelings exercises:

1. No examples about each other

You can talk about your feelings toward each other any other time, but not during the feelings exercise. It's important not to violate this guideline.

2. Maintain eye contact

The second guideline is to look each other in the eyes while sharing your feelings. Looking each other in the eye is important as intimacy starts and as it maintains. There is so much truth in the old saying that the "eyes are the window of the soul." When we look into another's eyes, we can see them.

3. No Feedback

The last of the guidelines for the feelings exercise is as important as the first two guidelines. During the exercise, as your husband or wife is sharing, there are to be no comments about the feelings shared.

3. Praise

You are the primary voice in your spouse's life. Being silent is the cruelest thing you can do to your spouse. The spouse who hears neither bad nor good from their spouse, to whom they committed their life and with whom they raised children, grows hollow inside.

If we are to be like our Father in heaven, which needs to be our goal as Christians, then nurturing and praising others will be part of His nature expressed through us. Now again, I realize better than most that praise or nurturing is not

something all of us grew up with.

Praise and nurturing one another is an essential ingredient for a vibrant, ongoing, intimate relationship. In the next 100 days of practicing praise and nurturing, you will eventually get skilled and comfortable. For some spouses, the giving of praise is not difficult, but receiving or acknowledging praise is. For others, both are difficult.

Praise, both giving and receiving, is a skill. Skills can be learned by anyone. As you daily practice the praise exercise, you and your spouse will experience the oil of intimacy drip unto your soul and heal areas of dryness you didn't even know existed.

The specifics of this exercise are very similar to the feelings exercise. First, you individually think of two things that you love, appreciate or value about the other person.

That is the nurturing or praise exercise. It may look simple for some, but for others, it is work. All I can tell you is that this exercise is sweet. When combined with the other two daily exercises, it can make a profound shift toward intimacy with your spouse.

I know these exercises will take time and work. The work part gets easier even after about 10 days or so. I suggest for the next 100 days, you allow this structure and skills to give to your marriage what they have blessed those who have implemented them over the years. {eo}

Doug Weiss, Ph.D., is a nationally known author, speaker and licensed psychologist. He is the executive director of Heart to Heart Counseling Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the author of several books including, *Partners: Healing from His Addiction* You may contact Dr. Weiss via his website, , by phone at 719-278-3708 or through email at heart2heart@.