

Improving Your Lifetime Partnership

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I. Introductions, Workshop Goal

Goal ... stimulate some “thinking” and “long term planning” for the sustaining and enrichment of our marriages to the point we glorify God, fulfill our life’s mate and will have enjoyed our lifetime partnership.

Agenda ...

- ✓ The nature of partnerships
- ✓ Anchor #1 ... Intimate Relationships must be Developed & Protected
- ✓ Anchor #2 ... Developing our Spiritual Oneness
- ✓ Anchor #3 ... Navigating Difficulties & Life Changes



II. The Nature of Partnerships



Creation (the origin) ... our first insight into a lifetime of partnership ...

Genesis 1:25-31 (NASB) *And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food”; and it was so. And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

- Observations ...
 - ✓ God designed creation with lifetime partnerships in mind.
 - ✓ Created in God’s image, man and woman were designed to have unbroken and unending fellowship and companionship.
 - ✓ Creation resulted in a lifetime objective for the couple of being fruitful and subduing creation together.
 - ✓ God raised His level of satisfaction from good to very good upon completing the commissioning.

Genesis 2:18 (NASB) *Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.”*

- Observation –
 - ✓ God observes it is not good for man to be by himself.
 - ✓ God did not consult man to determine the criteria for suitability.



"Experience teaches us that shallow, surface relationships will not remove aloneness. It's possible to be married and still feel alone; it's possible to be around people all day long and still feel lonely. That's why we say that only intimate relationships are the antidote for aloneness because intimacy involves a deep mutual "knowing" for the purpose of caring involvement." Unlimited Partnership – Downer, Ferguson

Genesis 2:22-24 (NASB) *And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*

Genesis 2:24 (NLT)
This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

- Observations –
 - ✓ God's creative energy fashioned a woman to fit mans need. Man was exhilarated with the result.
 - ✓ End game ... is the union of the couple into lifetime partnership.

“Partnership” – Webster defined ...

- a legal relation existing between two or more persons contractually associated as joint principals in a business.
- a relationship resembling a legal partnership and usually involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities.

Q ... How do we discover what our rights and responsibilities are in our marriage partnership?

Putting on the new self →



The context ... My new life is in Christ

Colossians 3:1-3 (NASB) *If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

"Until I am aware that my needs are already met in Christ, I will be motivated by emptiness to meet my needs. When by simple faith I accept Christ's shed blood as full payment for my sins, I am brought into relationship with an infinite Being of love and purpose who fully satisfies my deepest needs for security and significance. Therefore, I am freed from self-centered preoccupation with my own needs; they are met. It is now possible for me to give to others out of my fullness rather than needing to receive from others because of my emptiness. For the first time, I have the option of living selflessly. Lawrence J. Crabb Jr.

The Transformation (an on going process) ... My new potential

Colossians 3:5-11 (NASB) *Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him — a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.*

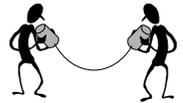
The Expectation ... My new relational tools (a rich treasure chest)

Colossians 3:12-16 (NASB) *And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*

*And beyond all these things **put on love**, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Finally → The Partnership ... Our Roles in the Partnership

Colossians 3:18-19 (NASB) *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.*



III. Intimate Relationships must be Developed and Protected

"Intimacy doesn't just "happen"; it takes conscientious effort to develop close, meaningful relationships. And once intimacy is established, it must be protected. This twofold emphasis is seen in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy (Satan wants to destroy the closeness we have with God and others); I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" ..." Unlimited Partnership - Downer, Ferguson

A. Developing "Building" an Intimate Partnership

- ✓ Blending our lives together.
- ✓ Building strong communication skills. (not addressed)
- ✓ Understanding our partners intimacy needs.
- ✓ Developing harmony in decision-making

"The couple is unlike the individual in that it must act for its own preservation in a much more deliberate way than the individual. Individuals might contemplate suicide, but rarely forget to eat, whereas couples often forget to nourish their relationship." Mary Anne McPherson Oliver

1. Blending our lives in partnership ...

Matthew 19:5-6 (NASB95) *'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? "So they are no longer two, but one flesh"*

Webster defines Blending - **1** MIX; especially to combine or associate so that the separate constituents or the line of demarcation cannot be distinguished, **2** to prepare by thoroughly intermingling different varieties or grades

- Set Goals for your marriage together ... and discuss regularly – couples goal setting weekends.
- Discovering common points of connection – Hobbies, shared preferences, and similar passions.
- Build gifting/talent overlaps into strengths.
- Maximize the encouragement and energy derived from accomplishments together.



Q ... What kinds of things do you do best together? How do accomplished goals bring joy, encouragement and a sense of unity?

2. Understanding our partner's intimacy needs ... (Top 10 Intimacy Needs)

Philippians 2:3-4 (NASB95) *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*



Ephesians 4:32 (NASB95) *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

Others centered → What are the messages we want to convey?

- Affectionate Caring – “I care about you.”
- Vulnerable Communication – “I trust you.”
- Joint Accomplishment – “I need you.”
- Mutual Giving – “I love you.”



Responsibility to each other →

1 Corinthians 7:3-4 (NASB95) *The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*

3. Develop harmony in decision-making ...

Philippians 2:1-2 (NASB95) *Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*

- Shared Information – who is the best at gathering information?
- Don't let the other be BLIND-sided – don't spring decisions on each other.
- Prayerfully defer to each others STRENGTHS.
- Seek for Agreement and Consensus in major decisions.

B. Protecting “Guarding” your Intimate Partnership

- ✓ **Affair Proofing Your Partnership**
- ✓ **Properly Prioritizing Extended Family**
- ✓ **Check Competing Loyalties**



1. Affair Proofing Your Partnership →

Why do we tend to ignore the importance of putting hedges around marriages?

- Not important ... “auto pilot mode”
- Don't recognize threats
- Inaccurate assumptions about condition of marriage
- Bought into Cultural/Societal norms – permissive standards

- Loving Your Marriage enough to Protect It by Jerry Jenkins

- “I will never threaten divorce in an argument”.



2. Prioritizing Extended Family Relationships

How do we balance the priority marriage relationship with the extended family?

Matt 19:4-6 *And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”*

Principles guiding our relationship with the Extended family ...

Ex 20:12 *“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.*

“One of the major causes of marital breakups in the Christian community is the lack of protective hedges that spouses should plant around their marriages, their heads, their hearts, their eyes, and their hands.” Jerry Jenkins

Eph 6:4 *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*

Titus 2:4 *so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children*

3. Check Competing Loyalties

What are competing loyalties? Competing loyalties will be defined here as: any thing, person, or circumstance that pulls one away from their primary commitment.

I Cor 11:3 *But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.*

Eph 5:22,23 *Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.*

Mutual Submission: The principles of loving service, mutual submission, and self-denial are paramount to not only a healthy marriage, but also to our personal growth in Christlikeness. This should be the underpinning of our marriage.

Gal 5:13 *For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"*

Eph 5:21 *and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ*

Phil. 2:3 *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;*

The truth is, there are only so many hours in a day, and only so much we can put our energies into. We have to make choices. And if you don't pick your husband as #1, that favor will, sadly, be returned." Dr. Laura Schlessinger

IV. Developing Spiritual Unity "Oneness"

- ✓ Harmony of our Spiritual Gifts and Talents
- ✓ A common CALLING to God's will
- ✓ Experience of Shared Spiritual Oneness



A. Harmony of our Spiritual Gifts and Talents

Learn how to work together – maximizing each others gifts and talents.

- Honor your wife as a joint heir of the grace of God.

1 Peter 3:7-8 (NASB95) *You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;*

- Holy Spirit has gifted all members of the Body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:7 (NASB95) *But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

1 Peter 3:7 (The Message) *The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground.*

1 Corinthians 12:11 (NASB95) *But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.*

1 Corinthians 12:25 (NASB95) *so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.*

B. Shared or common **CALLING** in ministry

Develop a Mission Statement as a couple (and family) → 7 Habits of Highly Effective People



1 Peter 2:9-10 (The Message) *But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.*

- ✓ Vet ministry opportunities against your Calling

C. Shared Spiritual Oneness

Develop some ways you connect & communicate your spiritual values, intimacy with the Lord, and the content of what God is saying to you. Variety is important, so change as often as needed to keep the experience fresh.

- Participate Together → Pray together, worship as a couple, devotional times, Quiet Times done individually but together, retreats, couples Bible Study groups, short term ministry projects.
- Knowledge → have information about the other person - share what you are getting from the Word of God, applications, Prayer Requests, share verses or promises claimed, couple staff meeting.



V. Navigating Difficulties and Life Changes

What gives rise to life changes?

- Seasons of life → leaving home, marriage, birth of child, empty nest, retirement, caring for aged parents, death/disability of spouse, etc.
- Crisis or Unexpected Events → job or career change, unplanned pregnancy, adult child returning home, divorce, major illness, relocation or move, infertility, etc.



What is the possible Impact on your Partnership?

- ✓ Constructive – drawing together, feelings of accomplishment, great communication.
- ✓ Destructive – blame shifting, lower level of physical intimacy, independent lifestyles develop, self focused, bitterness & anger, conflict.

Recovering from Disagreements and Difficulties?

- ✓ Common “Playing Field” – all are sinners.
- ✓ Causes of disagreements → poor communication skills (expectations or decision making), failure to fully resolve conflicts, life change issues, adultery & infidelity.
- ✓ Resolution – always seek to resolve small conflicts, don't keep records.
- ✓ Learn how to have a disagreement – set some ground rules
- ✓ Forgive each other

*Forgiveness is the act of setting someone free from an obligation to you that is a result of wrong done against you.”
Charles Stanley*

Couples-Communication Strengths Finder

It is the rare couple that periodically articulates what they do well as a team. **Think about it.** Most couples are more prone to complain about their pitfalls than they are to praise themselves for their successes. If we aren't careful, there's something about the nature of relationships that causes us to exchange pep rallies for gripes sessions. Don't fall into this temptation – especially as it relates to your ability to communicate.

Begin this exercise by scanning the list below and marking things you do well and things your partner does well. Once you have done that, review your column of check marks and note which items you both well and which items neither of you do particularly well. Feel free to add to this list any communication abilities that are missing for you. And, as always, the more honest you are, the more helpful this exercise will be to you.

Who does this well...	You	Spouse	Both	Neither
Listening without interruption	-	-	-	-
Staying on topic	-	-	-	-
Being ready to apologize	-	-	-	-
Controlling emotions appropriately	-	-	-	-
Giving full attention	-	-	-	-
Identifying and expressing feelings	-	-	-	-
Thinking clearly before speaking	-	-	-	-
Reserving opinion until the right time	-	-	-	-
Maintaining eye contact while talking	-	-	-	-
Being appropriately vulnerable	-	-	-	-
Permitting productive conflict	-	-	-	-
Speaking with clarity	-	-	-	-
Inviting and receiving feedback	-	-	-	-
Appropriately using humor	-	-	-	-
Coming across as personally warm	-	-	-	-
Expressing more genuine interest	-	-	-	-
Being assertive with needs	-	-	-	-
Knowing when to talk and when to not	-	-	-	-
_____	-	-	-	-
_____	-	-	-	-

The items that you checked “both” are what you perceive as your current couple-communication strengths. Those which you think neither of you do particularly well are your current couple-communication deficits.

Now, compare notes with each other as your mentors facilitate a conversation to help you see which items you both agree are your current communication strengths. If you don't have any at this point, relax.

Couple's Marriage Mind-Set

You view your marriage partner through a series of filters. Below is a list of these filters. Looks through it and **check the six or so most descriptive** of how your view your partner.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Accepting	<input type="checkbox"/>	Careless	<input type="checkbox"/>	Demanding
<input type="checkbox"/>	Adaptable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Caring	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dependable
<input type="checkbox"/>	Aggressive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cheerful	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dependent
<input type="checkbox"/>	Annoying	<input type="checkbox"/>	Clever	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determined
<input type="checkbox"/>	Anxious	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cold	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disciplined
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bitter	<input type="checkbox"/>	Confident	<input type="checkbox"/>	Efficient
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brave	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conforming	<input type="checkbox"/>	Elusive
<input type="checkbox"/>	Calm	<input type="checkbox"/>	Controlling	<input type="checkbox"/>	Energetic
<input type="checkbox"/>	Carefree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Critical	<input type="checkbox"/>	Friendly
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gentle	<input type="checkbox"/>	Naïve	<input type="checkbox"/>	Relaxed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Giving	<input type="checkbox"/>	Narcissistic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reliable
<input type="checkbox"/>	Greedy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Negative	<input type="checkbox"/>	Respectful
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gruff	<input type="checkbox"/>	Noisy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rigid
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gullible	<input type="checkbox"/>	Objective	<input type="checkbox"/>	Self-conscious
<input type="checkbox"/>	Helpful	<input type="checkbox"/>	Passive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Spontaneous
<input type="checkbox"/>	Idealistic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Patient	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stubborn
<input type="checkbox"/>	Inconsiderate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Perfectionistic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tactful
<input type="checkbox"/>	Innovative	<input type="checkbox"/>	Petty	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tender
<input type="checkbox"/>	Insensitive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Playful	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trusting
<input type="checkbox"/>	Intelligent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Principled	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trustworthy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Irresponsible	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protective	<input type="checkbox"/>	Understanding
<input type="checkbox"/>	Irritable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rational	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unpredictable
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jealous	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reactionary	<input type="checkbox"/>	Visionary
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kind	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reasonable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Witty
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lazy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reassuring	<input type="checkbox"/>	Worried
<input type="checkbox"/>	Manipulative	<input type="checkbox"/>	Regretful	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	

Couple's Marriage Mind-Set

Once you have checked the top half-dozen ways you tend to view your spouse, **determine whether they are mostly positive or negative** (the list is composed of forty filters in each category). In the space below, note the negative filters through which you tend to view your spouse and when you are most likely to use them.

Filter: _____. I see this quality when my spouse...

Filter: _____. I see this quality when my spouse...

Filter: _____. I see this quality when my spouse...

Filter: _____. I see this quality when my spouse...

Filter: _____. I see this quality when my spouse...

Filter: _____. I see this quality when my spouse...

MOST COMMON THREATS INVENTORY

This is a list of the most common threats to marriages. Check all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Frequent conflict
<input type="checkbox"/>	Financial pressures
<input type="checkbox"/>	Power struggles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Busy schedules
<input type="checkbox"/>	Work pressures
<input type="checkbox"/>	Career crisis
<input type="checkbox"/>	Infertility
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tumultuous relations with extended family
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rebellious child
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual unfulfillment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of spiritual intimacy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Frequent communication breakdowns
<input type="checkbox"/>	Major illness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Addictions
<input type="checkbox"/>	Infidelities and lack of trust
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grief or loss
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other: _____

Now, check all the items that are good in your marriage right now.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Being honest with each other
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sharing housework
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shared humor or laughter
<input type="checkbox"/>	Having strong social support
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sharing a vision for our future
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enjoying a committed church life together
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fulfilling sex life
<input type="checkbox"/>	Having a date night
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blessing of having good children
<input type="checkbox"/>	Physical health
<input type="checkbox"/>	Secure financial future
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shared interests and hobbies
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strong extended family relationships
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supporting each other in prayer
<input type="checkbox"/>	Secure in our marriage commitment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional health
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other: _____