

ENRICHING YOUR MARRIAGE

NAVIGATORS
— LEAD ON —

WHATEVER **HE** ASKS. WHEREVER **HE** LEADS.

ENRICHING YOUR MARRIAGE



This is a five-part plan to help you and your partner enrich your marriage.

Remaining married is hard enough; statistics show about 50% of marriages end in divorce. When there are additional stressors, such as COVID-19 restrictions, vulnerabilities show.

Shanghai divorce lawyer Steve Li says his caseload increased 25% during the city's lockdown. When the virus hit, on the eve of the festivities, extended families in many cities had to endure an additional two months trapped under the same roof. Counsellors in the UK and Australia noted a rise of over 40% in marital disputes. Fortunately, COVID-19 has not affected us very much, but even we (Doug and Geneve) have had our stresses and strains - you would think we would have this figured out after over fifty years of married life together!

So why is this happening when the evidence of the benefits of long-term marriage are so clear and well researched? It is well documented that marriage gives health (loneliness is a health hazard), is better for children, gives more satisfying sex, and leads to better financial outcomes. Marriage has some compelling runs on the board!

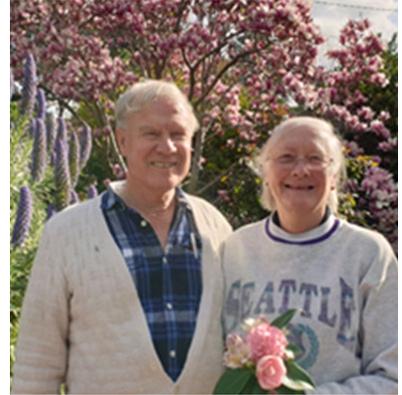
We are not going to look at what goes wrong, instead we will explore how you can add value to your marriage. You may already 'know' this information but are you experiencing the full benefits?



The areas we have chosen to look at are:

- Appreciating each other and showing gratitude
- Communicating with each other
- Communicating with God
- Complementing each other – in good times and not so good times
- Celebrating together

This is our gift to you. You can use it however you wish. We think doing all parts is best and they should be spaced out with about a week between them. That would mean about 3-4 weeks altogether. However, even just doing a part will be helpful. But please don't dabble and 'immunise' yourself from getting the real thing! Do whatever you choose thoroughly. The important exercises and video links are in the text. You may print copies for yourselves as you process together if that would be helpful.



Our prayer is that you will experience a real boost in your marriage. May you overflow with wisdom, success, gladness, peace and fun as you live the years together.

Doug and Genevieve Utley



APPRECIATING EACH OTHER AND SHOWING GRATITUDE

So, who is this person I married?

When you were getting to know each other, what did you like about your lover? What was the attraction? Write down a few things you appreciated back then.



Appreciating is one thing, but *showing appreciation* is something else. Researchers from the University of Georgia conducted a survey of 468 married individuals and asked them questions about their finances, their communication, and how they express gratitude to their spouses. The study found expressions of partner gratitude was a significant predictor of marital quality.

According to researchers, feeling appreciated and believing that your partner values you has a great impact on how you feel about yourself, your marriage and your commitment to making it last. Showing appreciation builds self-esteem, resulting in more confidence and emotional energy. It communicates love and that you value your marriage. The opposite is also true. Showing disrespect in any way is hurtful, attacks the other person's esteem and can lead to conflict. The Gallop Organisation found it takes twenty-two positive interactions to overcome one negative one!

You may be thinking '*this is all very well, but the person I married has changed. I am now married to someone else!*' Perhaps you also have changed.

So, now list five things you **currently** appreciate about your partner.



Read Proverbs 16:24: *'Pleasant words are honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones,'* and share your lists with each other, saying, *'I appreciate you because....'* and *'Thank you for.....'*



Before going to sleep, one of you read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a to the other. Change the next night and continue that pattern for the week.

Before we move on...

1. Give each other the gift of a compliment each day this week.
2. Ask your spouse if they have ever felt disrespected by you. Apologise and determine to change by not speaking your negative thoughts and choosing to compliment instead.
3. What is your partner's 'Language of Love'? It is not about sex. It is what makes them feel loved and appreciated.

The languages include:

- Acts of Service
- Words of Affirmation
- Tangible Gifts
- Touch
- Quality Time



Talk with each other about this to check. Each think of ways you can express love verbally or non-verbally at least once per week.

*Read Gary Chapman's book, *'The Five Love Languages'*, if you want more information.

4. Rate yourself below as to which characteristics are most like you (up to 10), and which are least like you (down to 1). Then ask your spouse's opinion.

Extrovert - energised with others	Introvert-energised being alone
Logical about issues	Intuitive about issues
Task orientated	People Orientated
Structured	Flexible
Initiator: decide and act now	Supporter: Think about it more

5. Look and listen to Nicky and Sila Lee speak on their marriage on this video:

<https://youtu.be/dBJUI2huCB0>

Note your take home messages and then share them with each other, including whether you most identify as a Rhino or Hedgehog!

“It is possible to give without loving but it is impossible to love without giving.”

~ Anonymous



COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER

"Everyone has a need to be listened to, understood and taken seriously." ~ Paul Tournier



We (Doug and Geneve) are opposites in so many ways. Questionnaires show we have less than a 10% chance of understanding each other well! We have to work on our communication. Understanding who we each are (rhino/hedgehog etc.) makes a big difference for us when it comes to communicating well. Doug has to learn to give Geneve enough time to process her ideas, and Geneve needs to articulate her thoughts and feelings as Doug is definitely not a mind reader! So being good listeners is paramount for us.

Solomon said, *'If one gives answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.'* (Prov 18:13). How often does one of you interrupt the other before they have completed what they want to say? *'The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking'* (Proverbs 15:28). James' advice is *'to be quick to hear and slow to speak and slow to get angry'* (James 1:19). Do I take a deep breath and process the words, and what is being said beneath the words?

Active listening takes focus, effort and concentration. It can't be done well if we are thinking of what I will say next or what I will be doing later or accessing our phones. It is very difficult when we are tired, hurt, burdened or bitter. It means listening without interruption and avoiding 'why' questions which lead to defensiveness. It is also difficult if the speaker is mumbling or not looking at the listener. So, if we want our partners to understand us, we each have to give them our prime time, and of course both need to 'be all there', focused and concentrating.



A good exercise is for the listener to repeat what they have heard the speaker say to check if they have 'got it'. Recognise the importance of what the speaker is saying by reflecting, "So, you feel...(emotion) because...(event)".

However, if the listener is to understand, **the speaker must be assertive**, clear and direct about what they think and want. They must look at the listener and be forthright in their words. This

doesn't mean being loud or dominant, but it does mean using 'I', not 'you', when they respectfully make positive constructive statements and requests. Creating a hypothetical (*'Suppose a person ...'*) is fine but don't expect your spouse to understand the 'hidden message' is actually what you mean.

Practice this now with each other; speaking, listening and then feeding back to your partner what you have heard. Then swap roles. Make the topic simple, such as your preference for your next holiday together, children's school, having friends over etc.



For example, **Speaker:** *"I would like us to go to the mountains for a restful summer holiday. (There is a lot to explore together in that desire!)"*

Before moving on to the next part...

1. Continue giving daily compliments.
2. Continue reading 1 Cor 13:4-8a to each other.
3. Give a 'language of love' gift.
4. Practice assertive speaking and active listening.
5. This seems like a lot of items but once patterns such as daily compliments are built in it takes no time at all.

Another suggestion made by Nicky and Sila Lee is setting aside a *date or date night* each week which could provide the time.

"To listen another's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be the greatest service one can give another." ~ Douglas Steere (abridged)

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD

Prayer is an expression of our relationship with God. As individuals, we believe and receive God into our lives through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection and we talk with God by praying. So now, as two people who have become one, it is a wonderful privilege to come to God *together* in prayer.



There are many reasons and benefits of praying together. Beginning by thanking God (be specific) for our spouse and praying a blessing makes us 'others focussed' from the outset. Praying together is humbling as we are quickly aware of any offenses and our need to ask forgiveness. It can increase intimacy, especially if we bring our struggles before God and each other. When we are united in our requests, God takes particular notice. (Matt 18:19)



Read this article and decide why you want to pray together:
<http://www.markmerrill.com/8-benefits-of-praying-together-with-your-spouse/>

You may have tried praying together and found it difficult. We can use our differences to strengthen our faith. Like any conversation, prayer will vary. Sometimes it is two separate prayers that we agree on together. Amen! It is worthwhile trying to pray **one prayer together**, one contributing a portion and the other adding a thought. (This won't work if one partner prays on and on and on and on). An example is Acts 4:24-30. How many people may have spoken in that prayer?

You can see an example of this type of praying together at https://youtu.be/lpphc4_IV4. This couple are North American, but much is culturally transferable.





There are other helps such as keeping a record of requests and answers, attaching promises, spending time listening to God and talking with each other, but as Confucius said, *‘A journey of 1,000 miles begins with one step.’*

So, keep praying together, or let’s get started.

Before moving on to the next part...

Listen to Rick Warren talk about conflict resolution.

<https://youtu.be/l1udN6OShf4>

Write down your thoughts and share them with your partner.

COMPLEMENTING EACH OTHER IN GOOD TIMES AND NOT-SO-GOOD TIMES

A couple who had been married for seventy years were being interviewed. They said they had disagreements, so the interviewer asked, "Did you ever consider divorce?" They both shook their heads but then the wife said with a twinkle in her eye, "I did consider murder a couple of times."



How are you both going with your daily compliments? It is interesting that someone who was exciting to have around initially can later become a pain in the neck! When God made a woman to be a partner to Adam, his reaction was, "Wow! At last! Someone like me." (Females and males share 60% of characteristics).

But she was also different. The differences are wonderful to begin with. *"She is so friendly and spontaneous";* or *"he is so stable and dependable"*. But after a while it can grate. *"Does he have to micromanage everything? Can't we just have some fun?"* or *"When is she going to realise that managing finances is not a game?"* It is easy to disagree.

It is important to realise that exercising our complementary roles produces a better outcome. When Doug was recently struggling to repair a bench seat, Geneve made a suggestion that really helped. "Two are better than one" Solomon said, "because they have a good reward for their work" (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

However, different perspectives can also lead to conflict. This can be an opportunity for growth unless our relationship has been damaged. Attend to that first, trying to be the first to ask forgiveness. Matthew 5:23 says **reconciling a relationship** is more important than worship! So, reconcile your relationship before attempting to **resolve any issues**.



We all have blind spots! Often, Doug finds out it is his tone of voice Geneve can find offensive. Humility, gentleness and wisdom are crucial. Each needs to acknowledge how *they have contributed to the conflict*. This is **not** about who started it! Each needs to acknowledge *the impact it had on the other person* and ask forgiveness for both.

Take time now to see if there are any offences that need to be acknowledged and forgiven by both parties, and just do it! Then we will be in a place to discuss an issue or conflict. It may not be possible to agree on everything, but we can 100% agree on being friends and together find a way forward.



A plan that works:

- Pray together for wisdom - James 1:5
- Choose a suitable time and place. (private, relaxed and distraction free)
- Clarify the issue at hand.
- Write it out, as then our thoughts disentangle themselves.
- Consider how each of you may have contributed to the current state of play.
- List the options for resolution without criticism. Discuss and clarify.
- Weigh the 'best options' as to:
 - How they will affect the issue if they are done or are not done
 - How they will affect either partner and so your marriage
- Recognize your agreement may look like:
 - **Capitulating** - where one party totally abandons their own view and owns their partners plan, so it becomes 'our plan'
 - **Compromising** where the solution involves some of each (70:30; 50:50 - etc.)
 - **Collaboration** where each abandons their own plan and contributes to a new solution that is a creative synthesis of views. It must now be branded as 'ours'
 - Decide who does what from this plan. Set a review date.
- Remember some of the thoughts you had from Rick Warren's message.



Before moving on to the next part...

1. **Express appreciation** for the compliments and 'language of love' gifts you have received.
2. **Thank God together for your relationship.**
3. **Look at the progress** made on the '*issue that needed resolving*'
4. List any other issues that may need discussion in the future.



CELEBRATING TOGETHER



When you were married you had a *celebrant* to officiate. They were there to lead the gathered guests to honour and praise you, to (hopefully) honour the God who invented marriage and to declare you 'married'. Then there was the party, (which used to be called the 'Wedding Breakfast' for some reason). However, there is so much to celebrate *now* in our marriages, and you don't need a celebrant!

Take time now to write down some things you can celebrate about being married to your spouse.

Geneve and Doug like to celebrate by going out for a special meal, an orchestral concert or a musical, or just sitting on the beach at sunset.

How will you celebrate? Here are a few ideas:

- Express thanks to God in a significant way.
- Don't wait for your Anniversary; an un-anniversary is fine.
- Take a day off work together and have someone mind the kids.
- Go out for a leisurely brunch.
- Play tourist in your own city.
- Go on an adventure course, a mirror maze, a water cruise, a botanical walk and finish with a couple massage and hot tub.
- Go to a nursery and choose an 'us' plant for a special pot or a place in your garden.
- Cook a meal together.
- Write a letter to each other and choose a gift.
- Have a picnic under the moon and stars and book into a hotel for the night.
- Look at your wedding photos/video, give your gifts and read your letters to each other.



Hopefully celebrating will be one of the goals you have for your marriage.



Some friends who have been married for decades were hugging in a resort pool. Another man in the pool asked, *“Ok, so what is the secret?”*

“Well, we have a third person in our marriage,” one of them said.

“What?”

The couple went on to explain that their close relationship with the Living God gives the motivation, insight and pleasure of being close to each other.

There are many things we haven't covered in these five parts such as finances, sex, children and in-laws. Sometimes it is advisable to get specialised help if you are stuck. However, we believe that if these dynamics are working in your marriage you will figure the rest out and have a wonderful life together.

The Blessings of Grace are yours!

Doug and Genevieve Utley

P.S - Just remember to PLAY:

Praise your companion's strengths

Laugh at your differences

Accept your personalities and roles

Yield

You Have Chosen Your Love ...



Now Love Your Choice.



WHATEVER HE ASKS. WHEREVER HE LEADS.

