

# *helping* **couples** *thrive*



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## *Healthy individuals create healthy marriages*

By Jill Savage

A thriving marriage is made of two thriving individuals building a relationship together. That would explain why the health of our marriages is ultimately determined by our individual health. But where do we start? By making one right choice at a time.

### **Emotional health**

Emotional health improves when we understand our emotional makeup and tend to our emotional needs. We can actively pursue emotional health as we address individual heart issues such as bitterness, unforgiveness, blame, lust, idolatry, pride, control and self-sufficiency. These sins tend to creep into our lives and too often we defend our right to hold on to them. Acknowledging sin for what it is, confessing it to God and then making a U-turn (repentance) to head in a different direction are important aspects of being healthy. Another important part of emotional health

in married life has to do with evaluating the positives and negatives of our families of origin. As husbands and wives, we each need to consider what we may have inadvertently carried into our marriage.

### **Mental health**

Mental health determines how we think, feel and act as we cope with everyday life. Reading, listening to teaching (podcasts, sermons, conferences), pursuing positive friendships and engaging in stimulating conversations can all be important parts of mental and marital health.

Mental health greatly affects relationships. When we pursue mental health, it helps us unpack the personal baggage that we inadvertently bring to marriage. As my husband, Mark, and I have worked on this, our marriage has benefitted as conflict has decreased, communication has improved, and joy and intimacy have increased.

## Physical health

Physical health develops when we take care of the body God has given us. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, we read that our body is a temple with which we are to glorify God. In light of the fact that God designed us with the need to feed, move, hydrate and rest our bodies, we have to ask ourselves how well we're doing with each of those responsibilities.

Physical health provides so many marital benefits! In addition to improving the physical attraction we have for one another, caring for our bodies also gives us the energy we need for family relationships and everyday activities.

## Spiritual health

Spiritual health weaves itself into our physical, emotional and mental health, and there are many practices that can help to strengthen us spiritually. Bible reading, prayer, attending church, being part of a small group or meeting a friend who encourages us in our faith are all valuable elements of tending to our spiritual health. Reading Christian books, magazines and blogs, and listening to Christian podcasts and teaching are also practical ways to pursue spiritual health.

We need to keep in mind that God can use marriage to make us more like Jesus every day. As we mature and pursue spiritual health, we weed out selfishness and increase forgiveness. We serve one another more freely. We accept accountability. We offer grace and love sacrificially. A marriage that is marked by love, forgiveness, grace, service and sacrifice is a marriage that is likely to thrive even in the hard times.

## Self-care is not selfish

Couples who do individual care ultimately do marital care because both husbands and wives grow stronger and healthier overall. And common sense suggests that healthy relationships emerge when healthy people come together in healthy, positive ways.

So, self-care is not selfish. It's an important part of being a healthy individual and having a healthy marriage. No matter how long we've been married, we can continue to grow in our understanding of our spouse, our God and ourselves.

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*Jill Savage is an international speaker and author of 14 books.*

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## The Care Cycle

*By Tara Lalonde*

In the Hope Restored program, we offer a tool to help us care for our emotions. The Care Cycle is intended to be done on our own, with an attitude of self-compassion and acceptance.

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### 1. Aware

What is going on in your body in this moment? Emotions often have a physical expression to them. Do you have tears? Is your heart racing? Does your stomach feel queasy?

### 2. Accept

While the emotions that arise may be uncomfortable, they are not harmful. We don't like unpleasant emotions, so we tend to try to avoid them. In this step, give yourself permission to feel whatever you feel. No judging. Simply be curious about it.

### 3. Allow

Ask God to be part of this Care Cycle with you, and then allow his perspective to influence you. He knows more about what is at the core of this than you do, and he loves you and this part of you more than you can ever imagine. Allow the love that cannot be separated from us (Romans 8:38-39), and even allow his gentle conviction that will never be condemning (Romans 8:1).

### 4. Attend

Explore your heart and what is going on inside. Be patient and be curious about what these emotions really are. What emotions are you feeling? Have you felt this before? When? Are you telling yourself anything that may make it worse? What is the truth of the situation? What is God's truth about you? Finally, what do you need now to feel calm and cared for?

### 5. Act

In this step, you simply act on what you have come up with in the previous step. Intentionally follow through with caring for yourself with gentleness and integrity.

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*Tara Lalonde is a registered psychotherapist and currently works as a marriage therapist with Focus on the Family Canada's Hope Restored program.*

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# 4 types of marriage conversations

By Dr. Greg Smalley

## Type 1: Informal marriage conversations

This conversation is perhaps the easiest, most natural form of communication. When you ask, “How was your day?” the typical comments that follow would land under this heading.

Small talk? Sure, but these conversations are still important to your marriage. They establish a simple connection between you and your spouse that doesn’t require exhausting emotional vulnerability. We can’t be in a state of deep, emotional intimacy every moment of our relationship. We’d wear ourselves out!

## Type 2: Administrative meetings in marriage

If our first type of communication is simple chitchat, the second is more like a business meeting. These conversations in marriage are loaded with action items – changes to the daily routine, to-do lists, appointments, social obligations, financial decisions, etc.

You can see why this mode of communication is important: It ensures that your marriage, your family, and your lives operate smoothly. We simply need to have these conversations.

But some couples can feel like their whole relationship revolves around these sorts of communicative “meetings.” And that’s not always healthy. If you feel overwhelmed by this type of communication, here’s an idea: Determine what types of decisions need to be discussed. Then be flexible, be adaptive, and most of all, be considerate of your spouse.

## Type 3: Challenges and conflict resolution

Every relationship has its ups and downs. The apostle Paul told us, “But those who marry will face many troubles in this life” (1 Corinthians 7:28). We must talk about those troubles. If we don’t, they only grow until they feel insurmountable.

Communication can be tricky to do well. The following breaks down the four different types of interactions we use, and why each is critical to a high-functioning relationship.

Sometimes these conversations are about relatively small troubles with rather easy solutions: “The waste disposal isn’t working. Who should we call?” Discussing challenging topics doesn’t always involve deep introspection or tears.

Other conversations can be more serious – when our spouse has hurt or disappointed us, for instance, or we disagree on something critical. They can be talks that happen in the midst of deep grief, anger, or confusion – when we’ve lost a job or we’re dealing with sickness.

Conversations connected to challenges can help us to grow, both as individuals and as a couple. They can expose our blind spots or lead us to make important and necessary changes in our lives.

Although these are critical conversations to have in a marriage relationship, they’re delicate, too, so we need to engage with a sense of grace. We need



to use our best active-listening skills (“So, I hear you saying . . .”), validate whatever emotions are in play, and be willing to offer forgiveness if it’s needed.

#### **Type 4: Life-giving conversations in marriage**

If all our conversations revolved around small talk, administration, and conflict resolution, we’d grow disinterested in talking to each other. Some couples seem to just run out of things to talk about. And it makes me wonder if they ignored a fourth critical type of communication.

The three modes of marriage communication discussed are reactive conversations – spurred on by some need or event. This fourth mode of marriage communication is often overlooked because it’s proactive.

Life-giving conversations are about getting to know your partner better and strengthening the bonds between you. They’re playful and affirming. They express gratitude and demonstrate curiosity. Ask your spouse questions you’ve never asked before. Unpack hopes and dreams.

The first three types of conversations will monopolise your time unless you intentionally make space for this one.

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*Dr. Greg Smalley is vice-president of Marriage and Family Formation at Focus on the Family in the U.S. and the author or co-author of several books.*

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## **Heart Talk**

*By Focus on the Family Canada*

Heart Talk is a five-step communication tool taught in Hope Restored marriage intensives. In their book *The DNA of Relationships for Couples*, Drs. Greg Smalley and Bob Paul explain how it helps you and your spouse share your heart’s desires.



### **1. Make safety the first priority.**

According to Dr. Paul, you should never make intimacy or openness your goal. The core thing every person needs to feel open is to first and foremost feel safe. When people feel safe, they relax, they open up and deeper intimacy becomes the natural result.

### **2. Listen to the words the speaker is saying.**

By listening to what they’re saying, you’re adding to this safe environment. You’re not reacting with solutions or a defence, you’re not feeling attacked, you’re simply taking the time to listen.

### **3. Listen with your heart.**

You may listen with your head, prepared to answer their questions and solve their problems, but listening with your heart allows your spouse to feel deeply understood and cared for – building even more safety into the environment.

### **4. Reflect back what they said.**

“Repeat back to the speaker what you heard, using different words, and then say, *Is that what you said?*” Smalley and Paul explain. “After the speaker confirms that you heard the words right, ask about feelings. Ask questions such as, *What were you feeling when that happened to you?* or *How does that make you feel?*”

### **5. Allow the other’s emotions to touch you.**

By following these steps, you’re more equipped to develop that empathy that may be missing from more superficial conversations. This may feel uncomfortable, but allowing yourself to feel what your spouse feels will develop a profound intimacy in your relationship.

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## Learn to *fight fair*

By Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott

One of the thoughts that went through Leslie's mind when we had our first fight was that there must be something wrong with us – that loving couples don't fight. We've since learned that this simply isn't true.

Consider the reasons for marital spats. First, people are not perfect – and neither is the world we live in. While it makes logical sense that there are no perfect marriages, many of us are still surprised when we encounter conflict and expect our marriage to be different.

But the goal of marriage is not to avoid conflict. Not by a long shot. If handled correctly, conflict can help build a stronger marriage. In fact, we've come to believe that conflict is the price smart couples pay for a deepening sense of intimacy. Conflict helps us peel away the superficial layers of a relationship and discover who we really are.

### Seeing the world through your spouse's eyes makes a difference

We make an error in marriage when we assume we know what our spouse is experiencing. We don't. Everyone interprets life from a composite of unique insights and perceptions. Only after entering our spouse's world with our heart and our head can we accurately understand his or her perspective.

To look at life through the same lens means asking two questions:

1. What does this situation, problem or event look or feel like from my spouse's perspective?
2. How is his or her perception different from mine?

Accurately understanding your spouse's hurts and hopes will change you. Once you consciously feel his or her feelings and understand his or her perspective, you will see the world differently. And in the majority

**All couples need a healing mechanism, a way to turn a new page in marriage. Knowing how and when to say you're sorry can make a big difference.**

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of cases, empathy is enough to bring a marital conflict to a screeching halt. It sets the stage for two simple words: "I'm sorry."

**An apology can either hinder or help**

When one partner blows it and the offence is minor (maybe someone forgets to put petrol in the car after promising to do so), a graceful apology is all it takes for the incident to be dropped. At other times, an apology can be surprisingly complicated.

Like lots of couples, one husband and wife we worked with would regularly short-circuit their arguments with hasty apologies. "I said I was sorry for what I did," one of them would say. "Now why can't you forget about it and move on?"

This form of apology is really a tool of manipulation. It's a way of getting off the hook and avoiding the real issue. What's worse, a premature apology blocks real change. One husband snapped at his wife at a dinner party. Later he said, "I'm sorry, but look, you have to understand that I've been under a lot of stress lately." The husband was avoiding responsibility for his insensitive behaviour. What his wife needed to hear was, "I'm sorry. It isn't right to lash out at you when I'm stressed." This would have communicated that her husband understood he had hurt her and would try not to do it again.

All couples need a healing mechanism, a way to turn a new page in marriage. Knowing how and when to say you're sorry can make a big difference. Ask yourself when and how you apologise. Does one of you apologise more than the other? Do you use apologies to whitewash issues? A sincere apology will leave you with a relieved sense of the air being cleared and a renewed feeling of closeness.

**Staying focused on the problem is more likely to lead to a resolution**

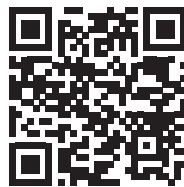
Remember to attack the problem, not the person. Our natural impulse during conflict is to defend and protect our position, not to accommodate the other person. If you accuse your spouse of always making you late, she is probably not going to say, "Oh, you're right. I'll be different from now on." She is more likely to tell you that you only make it worse by pressuring her or that you are too impatient or a hundred other reasons why she is not at fault. You will be far more productive if you focus on the problem of being late and work together, as a team, to devise a way of avoiding it. In other words, separate the problem from the person.

If we were to sum up fighting fair in a single word, it would be *cooperate*. You must be willing to flex and yield to your spouse. Scripture says, "Wisdom . . . is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17). If you cultivate a cooperative attitude with your spouse, you will save yourself and your marriage a lot of unnecessary grief. And you will have found the secret to fighting a good fight.

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*Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott are New York Times bestselling authors of Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts and the creators of the renowned SYMBIS Assessment (SYMBIS.com). Learn more at LesAndLeslie.com.*

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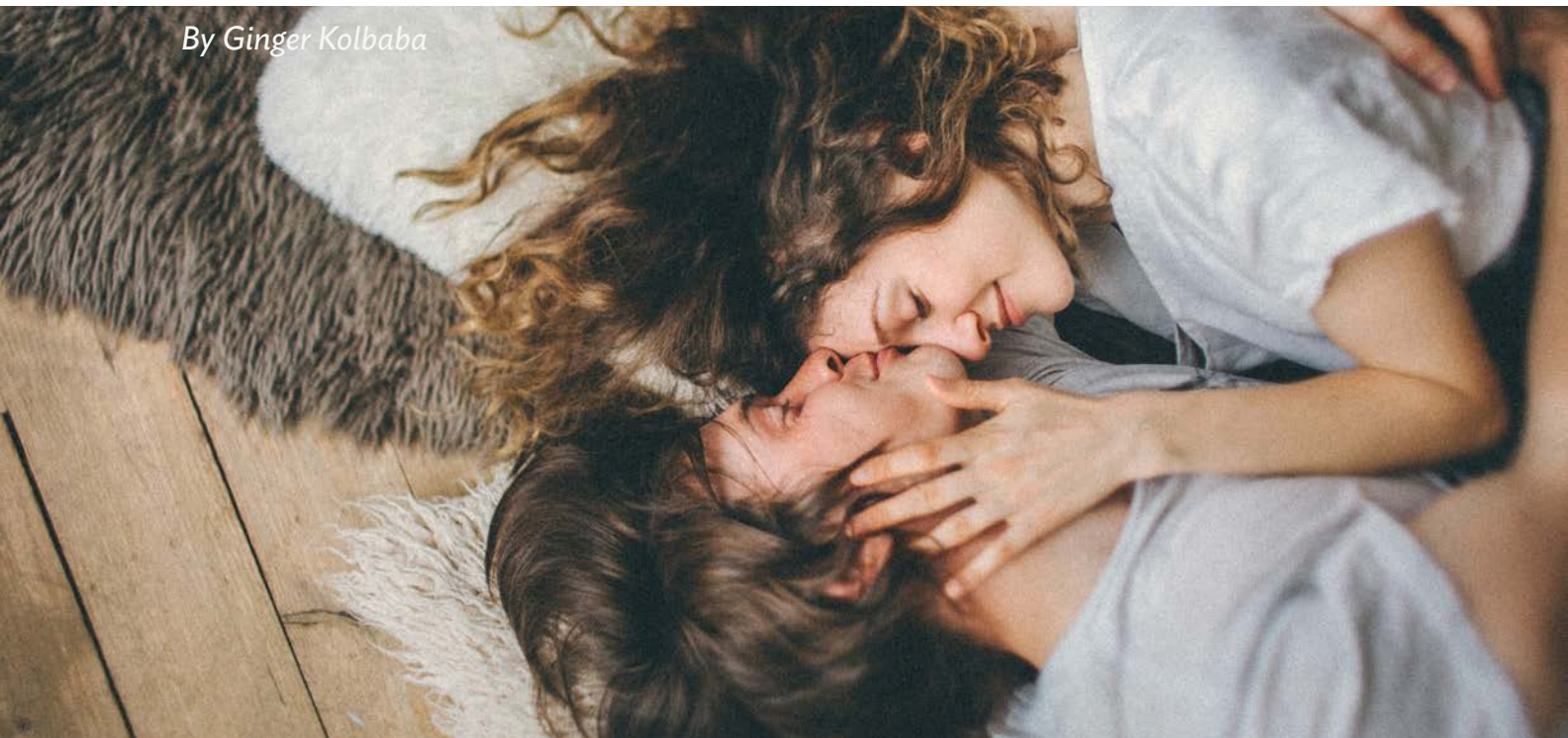
**Enrich Your Marriage video series**

Join marriage therapists Wayne Reed and Vicki Hooper to learn practical conflict and communication tools you can use to strengthen your relationship with your spouse.

**FocusOnTheFamily.ca/EnrichYourMarriage**

## 5 things experts wish you knew about healthy sex in marriage

By Ginger Kolbaba



It's the elephant in the bedroom: The very thing that can bring us some of our greatest marital joy can also lead to some of our deepest disappointments. Of course, we're talking about sex.

Debra Taylor and Dr. Michael Sytsma are co-founders of Sexual Wholeness Inc. Taylor is a Christian marriage and family counsellor, and Sytsma is an ordained minister, certified sex therapist and founder of *Building Intimate Marriages*. They've seen countless Christian couples who struggle with an unsatisfying sex life and they want every Christian couple to know these five things:

### **No. 1: Good sex is about adjusting expectations and working toward mutually satisfying resolutions**

The number one struggle with sex? Mismatched libidos – or what sex counsellors call “desire discrepancy.” Whether you're the husband or the

wife who desires sex more, your marriage is likely going to face this issue. And no manner of begging, cajoling, whining, withdrawing, threatening, criticising or stonewalling will achieve what you ultimately desire.

The best way to deal with desire discrepancy, according to Sytsma and Taylor, is to develop a shared vision of what you want as a couple and to offer each other grace, understanding and patience.

Sometimes that means it's best to back off some and try to understand the season your spouse may be going through. Sometimes the best way to strengthen such a marriage is to meet your spouse's needs outside the bedroom and help make things less stressful. And if you are the spouse with the lower desire, focusing on the good of the relationship sometimes means choosing to connect sexually.

## **No. 2: The best sexual technique comes through honest communication**

Both Taylor and Sytsma have met countless times with couples who admit they've never once talked to each other about sex. They continue to tolerate what doesn't work, Sytsma says, for fear of hurting the other person's feelings, for fear of conflict or even out of shyness. And letting fear limit your communication is a sure way to undermine a flourishing and fulfilling sex life.

Taylor and Sytsma insist that talking about sex is necessary. That includes open, curious, honest discussions about what turns you on and what turns you off, about what works and what doesn't. Continue those conversations throughout your marriage; the more you talk, the easier it will become.

## **No. 3: The best sex acts aren't sexual at all**

"Your body is only part of sex," Sytsma says. "The best sex acts build on a rich foundation of sensual, non-demand touch, focused attention and genuine affirmation."

Offering affirmation and encouragement, listening when your spouse talks, helping out around the house, holding hands, looking into each other's eyes when talking, and simply sharing life together all increase closeness and intimacy and can make sex not only more enjoyable but also more meaningful.

That means being present for your spouse. It's difficult to connect meaningfully when you are focused on other things – such as the children or technology.

Just as important as affirming your spouse is affirming yourself. Don't allow your shape or size, your hair or lack of it, your wrinkles or your belly bulge to keep you from being fully present in the moment.

## **No. 4: Quickies are great but shouldn't be the only option**

A common complaint sex counsellors hear is how busy couples are. And what's typically the first activity to go? Sex.

"Schedule it if you have to," Taylor says. Hire a babysitter, go away for a day or a weekend, come home early from work – do whatever it takes. "You need to relax, enjoy and focus just on the two of you."

To have good sex, you have to be intentional and available. While an occasional quickie certainly isn't a bad thing, make sure you also make time to relish and savour the gift of your mate.

## **No. 5: Aging will affect your performance – and that's normal**

Sytsma often sees couples who, as they age, complain about their lack of stamina or desire. Too often these couples misunderstand what happens to their bodies as they grow older.

Men tend to take these changes more seriously because what used to be dependable no longer is. Some simply shut down and no longer pursue their spouses. They sink into shame when they can't perform the way they used to, so they give up even trying.

Though you may no longer have the same physical ability you had in your 20's, you can still enjoy a rich, satisfying intimacy with your spouse as you combine open communication with the experience of truly knowing each other well. And that leads to the most important thing these counsellors want you to do: Show grace and kindness to your spouse.

Even if your sex life isn't what you want it to be, there's always hope. You may never have the perfect sex life – to be fair, nobody does – but you can have a sex life that brings you closeness, joy and fun.

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*Ginger Kolbaba was an award-winning author, editor and speaker.*

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**Improving Your Sex Life  
to Improve Your Marriage  
video series**

In this seven-part video series, counsellor Debra Fileta and author Gary Thomas will help you understand God's intention for sex in marriage, how to speak more confidently with your spouse about what can sometimes feel awkward to share, and how a richer sex life can help improve all facets of marriage. [FocusOnTheFamily.ca/Improving](http://FocusOnTheFamily.ca/Improving)

# Mastering your spouse's love language

By Dr. Gary Chapman

One of the most important lessons we can learn in marriage is this truth: Your spouse is not like you. Even if the two of you are extremely similar, you are also extremely different.

What makes one person feel loved will not necessarily make another person feel the same way, and unfortunately, we tend to express love to others in the way we wish they would express love to us. Then when our spouse doesn't respond positively to our expressions of love, we get frustrated. The problem is not the sincerity of our love; the problem is that we are speaking the wrong love language. There are five distinct love languages:

## 1. WORDS OF AFFIRMATION:

### Using words to acknowledge and encourage

"You look nice today." "I really appreciate what you did." "One of the things I like about you is . . ." Your words may focus on how your spouse looks, a personality or character trait, or something he or she has done for you.

## 2. RECEIVING GIFTS:

### Giving presents as an expression of love

A gift says, "I was thinking about you." The gift doesn't have to be expensive. Haven't we always said, "It's the thought that counts"? Let me remind you that it is not the thought left in your head that counts. It is the gift that came out of the thought in your head that counts. Gifts can be bought, made or discovered in nature.

## 3. ACTS OF SERVICE:

### Doing something for your spouse that you know he or she would like you to do

Acts of service may include cooking, washing dishes, vacuuming, wiping white spots off the mirror, cleaning the toilet, washing the car, mowing the grass, walking the dog, changing the baby's nappy. You may remember the old saying, "Actions speak louder than words." That's especially true if acts of service is your spouse's primary love language.

## 4. QUALITY TIME:

### Giving your spouse your undivided attention

This does not mean watching television together. It means looking at each other while you sit and talk. Or taking a walk while you talk. Or going out to eat, assuming that you have a conversation. If your spouse complains, "We just don't spend any time together," he or she is not saying that you do not live in proximity to each other. Your spouse is saying that you do not give him or her enough undivided attention.

## 5. PHYSICAL TOUCH:

### Making positive physical contact with your spouse

In a marriage, this can mean holding hands, kissing, embracing, making love, putting an arm around a shoulder or cuddling on the couch as you watch a movie.

Of these five love languages, each of us has a primary love language – one that speaks most deeply to us emotionally. It is similar to spoken language. Most of us grew up speaking a language that we relied on more than any other language. That's the language we understand best. The same is true of love. The problem is that we naturally tend to speak our own love language rather than the love language of our spouse. We assume that what makes us feel loved will make him or her feel loved. That is a false assumption. If you want to be effective in keeping emotional love alive in a marriage, you must discover – and learn to speak – the love language of your spouse.

## Challenges and suggestions

The initial challenge will be to discover your spouse's primary love language. I suggest three simple ways. One, observe his or her behaviour. How does he typically express love and appreciation to others? Your spouse is speaking his or her own love language, and you can learn it by observing daily behaviour. It's common in the early stages of marriage for us to speak our own love language and not the language of



our spouse. Consequently, even though our spouse is loving us, we're not really "getting it" because it is not being expressed in our primary love language.

A second suggestion is to record your spouse's complaints because they will reveal your husband's or wife's love language. If he says, "We don't spend time together anymore," he is telling you that his love language is quality time. If she says, "I don't think you would ever touch me if I did not initiate it," she's revealing that physical touch is her love language.

The third suggestion is to record what your spouse requests of you most often. If he frequently asks you to take a walk after dinner or have a weekend away together, he is asking for quality time. If she requests a back rub frequently, then she is asking for physical touch.

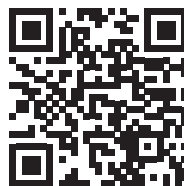
The good news is that even if you did not learn to do these things as a child, you can learn them as an adult. Once you understand the importance of speaking

your spouse's love language, hopefully you will be motivated to learn to speak that language. Meeting your spouse's emotional need for love is one of the essentials to having a long-term, healthy marriage.

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*Dr. Gary Chapman is a pastor, speaker and bestselling author of The 5 Love Languages.*

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# *Disappointing, difficult and destructive marriages:*

## What's the difference?

By Amy Van Veen

**W**hat does it mean to have a disappointing marriage, a difficult marriage or a destructive marriage? And why is it so important to be able to tell the difference? Mislabelling a struggling marriage can cause great harm, not just to the relationship, but also to the individuals in that relationship.

As a counsellor to struggling couples for over 35 years, Leslie Vernick has determined the key differences between these three relationships and what wives and husbands can do to not only improve their marriage but to also take care of themselves as God desires.

### **Disappointing marriages**

“[A disappointing marriage] is not quite what we thought it would be,” Vernick explains. “There’s not obvious sin, but there is some disappointment.”

#### **Disappointing marriages may include:**

- Lack of romance
- Not as much talking, sex or connection as expected
- Lack of financial security or extra money for a new house, nice holiday, etc.
- Lack of adventure or excitement; boredom in the relationship

#### **How to respond:**

You can recognise that every marriage is going to have frustrations, unmet expectations and disappointments, and communicate those disappointments with your spouse, thereby growing and maturing into a deeper relationship with them and with God. Or you can choose to let those daily disappointments go unspoken and grow into

resentment, bitterness and anger that will inevitably lead to destructive behaviour toward them.

Vernick warns that letting a disappointing marriage grow into a destructive one can result in infidelity or divorce in the search of a more “perfect” partner.

If a spouse finds themselves disappointed in the relationship, they may benefit from personal counselling, practicing gratitude, unpacking expectations, or simply taking the time to get to know their spouse for who they are, not who they want them to be.

### **Difficult marriages**

“A difficult relationship is one in which there are many stressors pressing in on the couple that make the relationship challenging,” she explains. “And these stressors and difficulties in marriage can cause a lot of conflicts.”

### Difficult marriages may include:

- Blended family and/or in-law issues
- Health and/or financial challenges
- Job changes
- Difficulties with children
- Personality and cultural differences

Whereas a disappointing marriage originates within our own perspective of the marriage, difficult marriages are plagued by circumstances outside the relationship, but the two people within the marriage are still – at their core – on the same team. They don't belittle each other or demean one another, but they may not know how to process their frustrations or resolve conflict in a healthy way.

### How to respond:

“If a couple in a difficult relationship can handle these stressors with mutual effort, compassion, respect and care, usually the relationship becomes stronger, not destructive,” Vernick says. “But if they don't handle these stressors wisely, then that relationship can easily move into a destructive relationship.”

In a situation like this, a couple may benefit from short-term counselling, or workshoping communication and conflict resolution. Focus on the Family Australia's marriage conferences and retreats may also be helpful options.

### Destructive marriages

“A destructive relationship is one that's very different than just a disappointing relationship or even a difficult one,” Vernick explains. “It's one in which the very personhood of the individual in the marriage is regularly disrespected, diminished or demeaned or even destroyed.”

### Destructive marriages often include:

- Absence of mutual care, mutual honesty and/or mutual respect
- Lack of responsibility and accountability
- A power dynamic where one spouse has more control than the other – whether physically, emotionally, mentally, financially, spiritually or all of the above
- Wounds are diminished and denied; blame is often transferred to the abused
- Lack of freedom or feeling of safety to voice concerns
- Strong reactions of badgering, pressure and punishment when concerns are voiced
- Chronic deceit
- Indifference to feelings and needs of the abused

Abusive or destructive marriages can often be difficult to identify because they all look different and they often appear very different to those outside the relationship than to those inside the relationship.

“In summary,” Vernick writes in her book *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*, “an emotionally destructive marriage is one where one's personhood, dignity and freedom of choice is regularly denied, criticised or crushed. This can be done through words, behaviours, economics, attitudes and misusing the Scriptures.”

### How to respond:

In a destructive marriage, it's important for the abused spouse to seek help and safety – and ultimately understand the simple truth that God sees your pain and does not desire you to continue in it.

Whether you're in a disappointing, difficult or destructive marriage, it's important for you to be able to name the reality of your challenging relationship in order to take appropriate steps to change and improve your marriage.

“Every marriage goes through seasons of closeness and separateness, happy times and hard times,” Vernick writes. “It is in marriage, more than any other relationship, where we come face to face with the best in ourselves and the absolute worst in ourselves, as well as the best and the worst in our spouse. How we do – or do not – face this awareness and respond to it becomes the running theme of our marital and personal story and will determine the success or failure of our marriage, and much of our life.”

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Amy Van Veen is editorial manager at Focus on the Family Canada.

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## RESOURCES

# *Additional resources* and information



## BOOKS

-  *9 Lies That Will Destroy Your Marriage*  
BY DRS. ROBERT PAUL AND GREG SMALLEY (F01798B)
-  *Reconnected*  
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