

How Life Works - Making marriage work? Proverbs

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Proverbs 21:19

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We have heard a lot about Marriage recently with the whole gay marriage bill. One of the positive things that came out of that is that it has raised the profile of marriage, the importance of marriage, the commitment of marriage, yes for some the sanctity of marriage. No matter how much the "institution of marriage" has changed over the years, no matter how much we have messed it up, I believe that God himself is the author of marriage. It's not a creation of man. Marriage is a God thing. And it can be a wonderful thing when it's done right.

In Sept, Gay and I celebrated our 30th anniversary. And over the last 30 years we've enjoyed some great years of marriage, probably about 5 of them!

In Genesis 2:24, God gives us the purpose of marriage when he says,

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

God's purpose and goal for marriage is oneness.

This week in my preparation I read about an elderly couple who had been married many years. And one night they went out to eat at McDonald's restaurant. It was a cold winter's night and the place was packed.

They were moving kind of slow when they walked in, He had a stick and she had her arm through his, they caught everyone's attention and you could just tell what people were thinking, "Isn't it nice to see a couple who've been together for probably fifty or sixty years. Still in love! What a wonderful thing."

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He then carefully unwrapped the plain hamburger, cut it in half and then put one half in front of his wife. Then he carefully counted out every one of the French fries, and divided them exactly in half, one pile for his wife and one for him. Then he took a sip of the Coke, and passed it to his wife and she took a sip and put the cup down right between them. I mean it was clear that they were going to share everything. That's Oneness.

And as the old man began to eat his few bites of hamburger you couldn't help but watch them. You could tell what people were thinking, "That poor old couple. All they can afford is one meal between them."

As the man began to eat his French fries a young man stood up and came over to the table and said, "Listen, can I buy you another meal?" They looked at him and said, "No. We're fine. We're used to sharing everything." So he sat down.

After a while, the crowd noticed that the little old lady hadn't eaten a thing. She just sat there watching her husband. So the young man came over again and this time insisted on buying them another meal. But the lady said, "No, no really. We're used to sharing everything together." So again he sat down.

As the little old man finished eating and was wiping his face neatly with the napkin, the guy just couldn't take it anymore, so he came over a third time and again offered to buy some food.

And after the couple said no again he finally asked the lady, "Ma'am, why aren't you eating? You said that you share everything. What are you waiting for?"

The little old lady looked up at him and said, "I'm waiting for his false teeth! We share everything!"

Yes the goal of marriage is oneness. But no, oneness does not mean you have to

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Genesis 1-3 is setting the scene of our relationship with God and with each other and with the world he created and in Gen 2:18 he reveals something of himself, and some of the way he has created us, and says something is not right, well at least isn't complete, man was alone. And aloneness wasn't good because God created all of us like him, to live in relationship, to live in community with him and with each other.

So God created woman to be an equal partner with the man, "*I will make a helper suitable for him.*" The word suitable literally means "a person corresponding to him." And it was God's goal for Adam and Eve and for every married couple since that they would become one flesh.

Now what does one flesh or oneness mean?

Oneness means unity. It means sharing our lives physically, spiritually, and emotionally. It means leaving our parents, cleaving to our spouse and weaving our lives together. The apostle Paul describes that kind of marital unity as a mystery because it's not easy to explain and it's certainly not easy to achieve.

The Trinity is a great illustration of oneness. God is one, but he exists in three different persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each one has their own name, their own identity, and their own function. And that's the way God designed marriage to work. Diversity in unity.

In a healthy marriage we become one with our spouse, but we maintain our uniqueness. I've talked to some people who are scared to death of getting married because they think they're going to lose their identity. They think they'll have to stop being themselves. In true oneness, a person's identity is never lost in the other. God's design is that the two come together in a powerful, mysterious way to form a new oneness that's unique.

It's hard to describe this oneness thing, but you know when you have it and you know when you don't. It's not something that comes with a marriage license or on your honeymoon and then you live happily ever after in it. Marital oneness takes work and time and sacrifice and prayer and you're always moving in to it and out of it.

So what does it take to make our marriages work? How do we master the art of marriage? Thankfully there is no secret. It's not rocket science. Any two people can make a marriage work, if they want to.

Making marriage work has everything to do with how well we communicate with each other. If the goal of marriage is oneness, then the key to oneness is communication. Communication is the key to your marriage, not financial security, not great sex, not mutual interests, and it certainly isn't as simple as "those who pray together stay together". There's nothing wrong with those things, they all help, but the key is communication. Communicating your thoughts and feelings, your hopes and dreams, your fears and failures. That's the key to becoming one.

When communication breaks down in a marriage relationship, oneness crumbles with it. And before long you can find yourself sleeping in the same bed with your spouse, night after night, week after week, month after month, yes even year after year, six inches apart, yet six million miles away from each other. Every married couple, if they're being honest, knows that feeling. Been there. Done that. No fun.

And God knows that, which is why a book of wisdom, Proverbs has so much to say about communication. The way it works and the way it doesn't. And for the rest of the message today I want to look at **four ways that couples sabotage oneness** in their marriage. And if you are not married it's still relevant as they all have to do with how we handle conflict. Couples who handle conflict well thrive, couples who don't survive, if they are lucky.

Four ways to sabotage oneness

Research shows that there are a lot of different ways that happy couples relate to each other. But interestingly there are just a few predictable ways that married couples repeatedly use to destroy their marriage. And all four of them are mentioned in the timeless truth of Proverbs.

And I want this to be practical. So I want you to rate yourself on a scale of 1-5 in each of these four patterns, with 1 being poor and 5 being awesome. And then if you're married I want you to talk about them sometime today with your spouse.

The first pattern is called **Escalation** ... one-upmanship.

Escalation happens in conflict when married couples start to go back and forth, upping the ante each time until the conversation gets more and more hostile. It's not something we learn, it comes naturally, well it does for me. We see it in kids. I remember this being a constant scenario when I was a kid. My mother would ask me, "Why did you kick him, because he hit me. Why do you hit him, well he touched my toy!"

In escalation, negative comments might start in just a small way but if left unchecked spiral out of control and lead to frustration and anger, verbal abuse, even violence. Reckless and damaging things are often said that can threaten or sabotage the

relationship. Most of us have been involved in these kinds of conversations and we know the damage they can do.

When it comes to conflict in marriage there are generally two kinds of people; Spewers and stewers.

Spewers are those who process their anger out loud, more often than not they are extroverts who think out loud, in fact they stereotypically do everything out loud! The **stewers** are those who tend to withdraw and process inwardly, more likely to be introverts. This doesn't mean they don't spew, they just take longer to get to that point!

Spewers have a tendency to escalate. Get two spewers together, and without a bit of wisdom you have a potential mess on your hands.

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B (just as sarcastic), "Oh, and you never forget to put it back on?"

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B, "Oh, I forgot just how obsessive compulsive you are. You're always right."

A, "I don't even know why I stay with you. You're so controlling."

B, "The door is unlocked."

That's escalation.

It can go from the cap on the toothpaste to the divorce court in just a matter of seconds. And that can threaten the oneness of a marriage.

Proverbs 12:18 says,

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 15:1 says,

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

You can't have a healthy marriage and say everything you feel, anytime you feel like it. Someone has to call time out and soften their tone, drop the daggers or real damage is going to be done. This is a trap I can fall into without even thinking, that is the problem, I don't always think before I speak.

On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate yourself on escalation? Again 1 is poor, it means you do it all the time, 5 means it's not a problem for you.

Second, **invalidation** ... or painful putdowns.

Invalidation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or not so subtly, puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other. It can take a lot of different forms.

Sometimes invalidation sounds like this ...

B (with a tear), "You know, I'm really frustrated by the poor job my supervisor did on my evaluation at work."

A, "ah, don't be silly, you shouldn't feel that way. It wasn't all that critical. I'd be happy to have an evaluation as positive as that from my boss. Just give it to the Lord?"

B (with a sigh and turning away), "You just don't get it. I'm really upset."

A, "Yeah, I see, but that doesn't change the fact that you're overreacting."

That's invalidation. A puts down B's feelings. And when we do that we're saying that what you're feeling is wrong. We may even think we're trying to help, trying to cheer up our wife or our husband by saying things like, "It's not that bad," or "just give it to the Lord." But in actual fact we're minimizing their thoughts and feelings and taking safety right out of the relationship. It's going to be harder and harder for them to be real when we say stuff like, "You shouldn't feel that way!"

Of course Proverbs talk about this?

Proverbs 25:20,

*Singing cheerful songs to a person with a heavy heart
is like taking someone's coat in cold weather
or pouring vinegar in a wound.*

When our partner is sharing a feeling, don't minimize it. Listen and affirm that feeling. Sometimes that means saying nothing, but giving a hug, sometimes that means saying, "I understand," sometimes that means saying, "This is what I'm hearing you say. Is that right?" Validation doesn't mean you agree with them, or that you would feel the same way, but it does mean you hear and respect their feelings.

On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate yourself on this one? Again I am not so sure I am very good at this one either, what an amazing woman I married to put up with me! One is poor, 5 means you're doing well in this area.

Third, **negative interpretations** glass half empty

Negative interpretation happens when one partner consistently believes the worst about the other. One partner assumes the motivations of the other are always more negative than they really are.

Sometimes it sounds like this ...

B, "You left the dishes unwashed again."

A, "Oh. I guess I forgot to do them when I came back from the prayer meeting."

B (with a bit of a sneer), "I guess you did. You know how much that irritates me."

A (exasperated), "Look, I forgot. Do you think I leave them just to irritate you?"

B (coldly), "Actually, that's exactly what I think. I've told you so many times."

A, "Yes, you have. But, I don't leave them just to annoy you. I just forget."

B, "If you cared what I thought about things, you'd remember."

A, "Look, I do the dishes nine times out of ten."

B, "More like half the time, and those are the times I remind you."

A, "Have it your way. It doesn't matter what actually happens. You're never going to believe me."

That's negative interpretation.

When not doing the dishes is treated as a malicious act. Again, it might sound like a little thing, but it isn't. Because the wife thinks, "He doesn't care about me. If he cared about me he'd do the dishes." But that's not true. He does care about her. Often the things our spouses do that really annoy us are either well intended or done without any thought of harm. And it really hurts to be accused of something you never intended to be malicious.

Proverbs 18:13 says,

To answer before listening, that is folly and shame.

We need to make sure we listen well. Don't jump to negative conclusions about your spouse's behaviour. Ask yourself if you're being too critical or negative. Look for ways that your partner shows they do care about you. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Understanding your spouse's love language, and your own, can really help you understand why they do or don't do something.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:3,5,

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.

Remember you're not perfect either. Cut your partner some slack, you'll need it too. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate yourself on this one? Again one is poor, 5 means you're doing well in this area.

Fourth, **withdrawal and avoidance** ... or hide and seek.

Withdrawal and avoidance happens when one person in the relationship just won't get into or stay with any kind of important discussion. It can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as just "tuning out" or "shutting down" during an argument.

Sometimes withdrawal sounds like this ...

B, "When are we going to talk about the way you handle your anger?"

A (sigh), "Can't this wait? I have to get these taxes done."

B, "I've brought this up at least five times already. No, it can't wait."

A (tensing), "What's to talk about, anyway? It's none of your business."

B (frustrated and looking right at A), "Our daughter is my business and I'm afraid that you're going to lose your temper and hurt her, and you won't do a single thing to deal with your anger."

A (turning away, looking out the window), "I'm not going to hurt her. There's no problem."

B, "You have to get some help. You can't just stick your head in the sand."

A, "I'm not going to discuss anything with you when you get like this."

B, "Like what? It doesn't matter if I'm calm or frustrated, you won't talk to me about anything important."

A (quiet, tense, fidgeting)

B, "Well?"

A (gets up to leave), "I'm going outside to get some peace and quiet." (A leaves, then B leaves to follow him)

Lots of couples do this dance when they deal with difficult issues. One pursues and the other withdraws. Studies show that in most marriages, not all the time, men tend to withdrawal and women tend to pursue. That's because most men don't feel emotionally safe staying in an argument. And so women feel shut out, like their husbands don't care about the relationship. But often that's not the case, the husband does care, he just hates the conflict.

The book of Proverbs says the wise person enters into those difficult discussions.

Proverbs 15:31,

Whoever listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.

And we're to deal with it quickly. In Ephesians 4:26-27, Paul says,

Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

While we shouldn't take this passage literally and fear postponing a conflict to another day. Avoiding important discussions and leaving difficult issues unresolved gives Satan all kinds of room to mess with a marriage.

On a scale of 1-5 how do you rate?

Marriage is a wonderful thing when it's working well. The feeling of oneness with your mate is awesome. But it's not about chemistry and sexual attractiveness, it's about communication. It's about sharing your life with each other, not your teeth. And the communication that makes a marriage work well is possible for every single one of us. Let's obey God together and enjoy what he intended our marriages to be.

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To answer before listening, that is folly and shame.

We need to make sure we listen well. Don't jump to negative conclusions about your spouse's behaviour. Ask yourself if you're being too critical or negative. Look for ways that your partner shows they do care about you. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Understanding your spouse's love language, and your own, can really help you understand why they do or don't do something.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:3,5,

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.

Remember you're not perfect either. Cut your partner some slack, you'll need it too. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate yourself on this one? Again one is poor, 5 means you're doing well in this area.

Fourth, **withdrawal and avoidance** ... or hide and seek.

Withdrawal and avoidance happens when one person in the relationship just won't get into or stay with any kind of important discussion. It can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as just "tuning out" or "shutting down" during an argument.

Sometimes withdrawal sounds like this ...

B, "When are we going to talk about the way you handle your anger?"

A (sigh), "Can't this wait? I have to get these taxes done."

B, "I've brought this up at least five times already. No, it can't wait."

A (tensing), "What's to talk about, anyway? It's none of your business."

B (frustrated and looking right at A), "Our daughter is my business and I'm afraid that you're going to lose your temper and hurt her, and you won't do a single thing to deal with your anger."

A (turning away, looking out the window), "I'm not going to hurt her. There's no problem."

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A (quiet, tense, fidgeting)

B, "Well?"

A (gets up to leave), "I'm going outside to get some peace and quiet." (A leaves, then B leaves to follow him)

Lots of couples do this dance when they deal with difficult issues. One pursues and the other withdraws. Studies show that in most marriages, not all the time, men tend to withdrawal and women tend to pursue. That's because most men don't feel emotionally safe staying in an argument. And so women feel shut out, like their husbands don't care about the relationship. But often that's not the case, the husband does care, he just hates the conflict.

The book of Proverbs says the wise person enters into those difficult discussions.

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While we shouldn't take this passage literally and fear postponing a conflict to another day. Avoiding important discussions and leaving difficult issues unresolved gives Satan all kinds of room to mess with a marriage.

On a scale of 1-5 how do you rate?

Marriage is a wonderful thing when it's working well. The feeling of oneness with your mate is awesome. But it's not about chemistry and sexual attractiveness, it's about communication. It's about sharing your life with each other, not your teeth. And the communication that makes a marriage work well is possible for every single one of us. Let's obey God together and enjoy what he intended our marriages to be.

How Life Works - Making marriage work? Proverbs

This morning we continue our series from the book of Proverbs called *How Life Works*. It is coming to an end, one more. Last week we talked about building strong families and one of the key points to building a strong family is a strong marriage. Proverbs says a lot more about marriage than what I said last week so I decided to build on that. Making Marriage work.

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We have heard a lot about Marriage recently with the whole gay marriage bill. One of the positive things that came out of that is that it has raised the profile of marriage, the importance of marriage, the commitment of marriage, yes for some the sanctity of marriage. No matter how much the "institution of marriage" has changed over the years, no matter how much we have messed it up, I believe that God himself is the author of marriage. It's not a creation of man. Marriage is a God thing. And it can be a wonderful thing when it's done right.

In Sept, Gay and I celebrated our 30th anniversary. And over the last 30 years we've enjoyed some great years of marriage, probably about 5 of them!

In Genesis 2:24, God gives us the purpose of marriage when he says,

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

God's purpose and goal for marriage is oneness.

This week in my preparation I read about an elderly couple who had been married many years. And one night they went out to eat at McDonald's restaurant. It was a cold winter's night and the place was packed.

They were moving kind of slow when they walked in, He had a stick and she had her arm through his, they caught everyone's attention and you could just tell what people were thinking, "Isn't it nice to see a couple who've been together for probably fifty or sixty years. Still in love! What a wonderful thing."

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He then carefully unwrapped the plain hamburger, cut it in half and then put one half in front of his wife. Then he carefully counted out every one of the French fries, and divided them exactly in half, one pile for his wife and one for him. Then he took a sip of the Coke, and passed it to his wife and she took a sip and put the cup down right between them. I mean it was clear that they were going to share everything. That's Oneness.

And as the old man began to eat his few bites of hamburger you couldn't help but watch them. You could tell what people were thinking, "That poor old couple. All they can afford is one meal between them."

As the man began to eat his French fries a young man stood up and came over to the table and said, "Listen, can I buy you another meal?" They looked at him and said, "No. We're fine. We're used to sharing everything." So he sat down.

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Genesis 1-3 is setting the scene of our relationship with God and with each other and with the world he created and in Gen 2:18 he reveals something of himself, and some of the way he has created us, and says something is not right, well at least isn't complete, man was alone. And aloneness wasn't good because God created all of us like him, to live in relationship, to live in community with him and with each other.

So God created woman to be an equal partner with the man, "*I will make a helper suitable for him.*" The word suitable literally means "a person corresponding to him." And it was God's goal for Adam and Eve and for every married couple since that they would become one flesh.

Now what does one flesh or oneness mean?

Oneness means unity. It means sharing our lives physically, spiritually, and emotionally. It means leaving our parents, cleaving to our spouse and weaving our lives together. The apostle Paul describes that kind of marital unity as a mystery because it's not easy to explain and it's certainly not easy to achieve.

The Trinity is a great illustration of oneness. God is one, but he exists in three different persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each one has their own name, their own identity, and their own function. And that's the way God designed marriage to work. Diversity in unity.

In a healthy marriage we become one with our spouse, but we maintain our uniqueness. I've talked to some people who are scared to death of getting married because they think they're going to lose their identity. They think they'll have to stop being themselves. In true oneness, a person's identity is never lost in the other. God's design is that the two come together in a powerful, mysterious way to form a new oneness that's unique.

It's hard to describe this oneness thing, but you know when you have it and you know when you don't. It's not something that comes with a marriage license or on your honeymoon and then you live happily ever after in it. Marital oneness takes work and time and sacrifice and prayer and you're always moving in to it and out of it.

So what does it take to make our marriages work? How do we master the art of marriage? Thankfully there is no secret. It's not rocket science. Any two people can make a marriage work, if they want to.

Making marriage work has everything to do with how well we communicate with each other. If the goal of marriage is oneness, then the key to oneness is communication. Communication is the key to your marriage, not financial security, not great sex, not mutual interests, and it certainly isn't as simple as "those who pray together stay together". There's nothing wrong with those things, they all help, but the key is communication. Communicating your thoughts and feelings, your hopes and dreams, your fears and failures. That's the key to becoming one.

When communication breaks down in a marriage relationship, oneness crumbles with it. And before long you can find yourself sleeping in the same bed with your spouse, night after night, week after week, month after month, yes even year after year, six inches apart, yet six million miles away from each other. Every married couple, if they're being honest, knows that feeling. Been there. Done that. No fun.

And God knows that, which is why a book of wisdom, Proverbs has so much to say about communication. The way it works and the way it doesn't. And for the rest of the message today I want to look at **four ways that couples sabotage oneness** in their marriage. And if you are not married it's still relevant as they all have to do with how we handle conflict. Couples who handle conflict well thrive, couples who don't survive, if they are lucky.

Four ways to sabotage oneness

Research shows that there are a lot of different ways that happy couples relate to each other. But interestingly there are just a few predictable ways that married couples repeatedly use to destroy their marriage. And all four of them are mentioned in the timeless truth of Proverbs.

And I want this to be practical. So I want you to rate yourself on a scale of 1-5 in each of these four patterns, with 1 being poor and 5 being awesome. And then if you're married I want you to talk about them sometime today with your spouse.

The first pattern is called **Escalation** ... one-upmanship.

Escalation happens in conflict when married couples start to go back and forth, upping the ante each time until the conversation gets more and more hostile. It's not something we learn, it comes naturally, well it does for me. We see it in kids. I remember this being a constant scenario when I was a kid. My mother would ask me, "Why did you kick him, because he hit me. Why do you hit him, well he touched my toy!"

In escalation, negative comments might start in just a small way but if left unchecked spiral out of control and lead to frustration and anger, verbal abuse, even violence. Reckless and damaging things are often said that can threaten or sabotage the

relationship. Most of us have been involved in these kinds of conversations and we know the damage they can do.

When it comes to conflict in marriage there are generally two kinds of people; Spewers and stewers.

Spewers are those who process their anger out loud, more often than not they are extroverts who think out loud, in fact they stereotypically do everything out loud! The **stewers** are those who tend to withdraw and process inwardly, more likely to be introverts. This doesn't mean they don't spew, they just take longer to get to that point!

Spewers have a tendency to escalate. Get two spewers together, and without a bit of wisdom you have a potential mess on your hands.

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A (sarcastically), "Do you think you can put the cap back on the toothpaste?"

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It can go from the cap on the toothpaste to the divorce court in just a matter of seconds. And that can threaten the oneness of a marriage.

Proverbs 12:18 says,

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 15:1 says,

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

You can't have a healthy marriage and say everything you feel, anytime you feel like it. Someone has to call time out and soften their tone, drop the daggers or real damage is going to be done. This is a trap I can fall into without even thinking, that is the problem, I don't always think before I speak.

On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate yourself on escalation? Again 1 is poor, it means you do it all the time, 5 means it's not a problem for you.

Second, **invalidation** ... or painful putdowns.

Invalidation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or not so subtly, puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other. It can take a lot of different forms.

Sometimes invalidation sounds like this ...

B (with a tear), "You know, I'm really frustrated by the poor job my supervisor did on my evaluation at work."

A, "ah, don't be silly, you shouldn't feel that way. It wasn't all that critical. I'd be happy to have an evaluation as positive as that from my boss. Just give it to the Lord?"

B (with a sigh and turning away), "You just don't get it. I'm really upset."

A, "Yeah, I see, but that doesn't change the fact that you're overreacting."

That's invalidation. A puts down B's feelings. And when we do that we're saying that what you're feeling is wrong. We may even think we're trying to help, trying to cheer up our wife or our husband by saying things like, "It's not that bad," or "just give it to the Lord." But in actual fact we're minimizing their thoughts and feelings and taking safety right out of the relationship. It's going to be harder and harder for them to be real when we say stuff like, "You shouldn't feel that way!"

Of course Proverbs talk about this?

Proverbs 25:20,

*Singing cheerful songs to a person with a heavy heart
is like taking someone's coat in cold weather
or pouring vinegar in a wound.*

When our partner is sharing a feeling, don't minimize it. Listen and affirm that feeling. Sometimes that means saying nothing, but giving a hug, sometimes that means saying, "I understand," sometimes that means saying, "This is what I'm hearing you say. Is that right?" Validation doesn't mean you agree with them, or that you would feel the same way, but it does mean you hear and respect their feelings.

On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate yourself on this one? Again I am not so sure I am very good at this one either, what an amazing woman I married to put up with me! One is poor, 5 means you're doing well in this area.

Third, **negative interpretations** glass half empty

Negative interpretation happens when one partner consistently believes the worst about the other. One partner assumes the motivations of the other are always more negative than they really are.

Sometimes it sounds like this ...

B, "You left the dishes unwashed again."

A, "Oh. I guess I forgot to do them when I came back from the prayer meeting."

B (with a bit of a sneer), "I guess you did. You know how much that irritates me."

A (exasperated), "Look, I forgot. Do you think I leave them just to irritate you?"

B (coldly), "Actually, that's exactly what I think. I've told you so many times."

A, "Yes, you have. But, I don't leave them just to annoy you. I just forget."

B, "If you cared what I thought about things, you'd remember."

A, "Look, I do the dishes nine times out of ten."

B, "More like half the time, and those are the times I remind you."

A, "Have it your way. It doesn't matter what actually happens. You're never going to believe me."

That's negative interpretation.

When not doing the dishes is treated as a malicious act. Again, it might sound like a little thing, but it isn't. Because the wife thinks, "He doesn't care about me. If he cared about me he'd do the dishes." But that's not true. He does care about her. Often the things our spouses do that really annoy us are either well intended or done without any thought of harm. And it really hurts to be accused of something you never intended to be malicious.

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Fourth, **withdrawal and avoidance** ... or hide and seek.

Withdrawal and avoidance happens when one person in the relationship just won't get into or stay with any kind of important discussion. It can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as just "tuning out" or "shutting down" during an argument.

Sometimes withdrawal sounds like this ...

B, "When are we going to talk about the way you handle your anger?"

A (sigh), "Can't this wait? I have to get these taxes done."

B, "I've brought this up at least five times already. No, it can't wait."

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B (frustrated and looking right at A), "Our daughter is my business and I'm afraid that you're going to lose your temper and hurt her, and you won't do a single thing to deal with your anger."

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Proverbs 15:1 says,

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

You can't have a healthy marriage and say everything you feel, anytime you feel like it. Someone has to call time out and soften their tone, drop the daggers or real damage is going to be done. This is a trap I can fall into without even thinking, that is the problem, I don't always think before I speak.

On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate yourself on escalation? Again 1 is poor, it means you do it all the time, 5 means it's not a problem for you.

Second, **invalidation** ... or painful putdowns.

Invalidation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or not so subtly, puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other. It can take a lot of different forms.

Sometimes invalidation sounds like this ...

B (with a tear), "You know, I'm really frustrated by the poor job my supervisor did on my evaluation at work."

A, "ah, don't be silly, you shouldn't feel that way. It wasn't all that critical. I'd be happy to have an evaluation as positive as that from my boss. Just give it to the Lord?"

B (with a sigh and turning away), "You just don't get it. I'm really upset."

A, "Yeah, I see, but that doesn't change the fact that you're overreacting."

That's invalidation. A puts down B's feelings. And when we do that we're saying that what you're feeling is wrong. We may even think we're trying to help, trying to cheer up our wife or our husband by saying things like, "It's not that bad," or "just give it to the Lord." But in actual fact we're minimizing their thoughts and feelings and taking safety right out of the relationship. It's going to be harder and harder for them to be real when we say stuff like, "You shouldn't feel that way!"

Of course Proverbs talk about this?

Proverbs 25:20,

*Singing cheerful songs to a person with a heavy heart
is like taking someone's coat in cold weather
or pouring vinegar in a wound.*

When our partner is sharing a feeling, don't minimize it. Listen and affirm that feeling. Sometimes that means saying nothing, but giving a hug, sometimes that means saying, "I understand," sometimes that means saying, "This is what I'm hearing you say. Is that right?" Validation doesn't mean you agree with them, or that you would feel the same way, but it does mean you hear and respect their feelings.

On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate yourself on this one? Again I am not so sure I am very good at this one either, what an amazing woman I married to put up with me! One is poor, 5 means you're doing well in this area.

Third, **negative interpretations** glass half empty

Negative interpretation happens when one partner consistently believes the worst about the other. One partner assumes the motivations of the other are always more negative than they really are.

Sometimes it sounds like this ...

B, "You left the dishes unwashed again."

A, "Oh. I guess I forgot to do them when I came back from the prayer meeting."

B (with a bit of a sneer), "I guess you did. You know how much that irritates me."

A (exasperated), "Look, I forgot. Do you think I leave them just to irritate you?"

B (coldly), "Actually, that's exactly what I think. I've told you so many times."

A, "Yes, you have. But, I don't leave them just to annoy you. I just forget."

B, "If you cared what I thought about things, you'd remember."

A, "Look, I do the dishes nine times out of ten."

B, "More like half the time, and those are the times I remind you."

A, "Have it your way. It doesn't matter what actually happens. You're never going to believe me."

That's negative interpretation.

When not doing the dishes is treated as a malicious act. Again, it might sound like a little thing, but it isn't. Because the wife thinks, "He doesn't care about me. If he cared about me he'd do the dishes." But that's not true. He does care about her. Often the things our spouses do that really annoy us are either well intended or done without any thought of harm. And it really hurts to be accused of something you never intended to be malicious.

Proverbs 18:13 says,

To answer before listening, that is folly and shame.

We need to make sure we listen well. Don't jump to negative conclusions about your spouse's behaviour. Ask yourself if you're being too critical or negative. Look for ways that your partner shows they do care about you. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Understanding your spouse's love language, and your own, can really help you understand why they do or don't do something.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:3,5,

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.

Remember you're not perfect either. Cut your partner some slack, you'll need it too. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate yourself on this one? Again one is poor, 5 means you're doing well in this area.

Fourth, **withdrawal and avoidance** ... or hide and seek.

Withdrawal and avoidance happens when one person in the relationship just won't get into or stay with any kind of important discussion. It can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as just "tuning out" or "shutting down" during an argument.

Sometimes withdrawal sounds like this ...

B, "When are we going to talk about the way you handle your anger?"

A (sigh), "Can't this wait? I have to get these taxes done."

B, "I've brought this up at least five times already. No, it can't wait."

A (tensing), "What's to talk about, anyway? It's none of your business."

B (frustrated and looking right at A), "Our daughter is my business and I'm afraid that you're going to lose your temper and hurt her, and you won't do a single thing to deal with your anger."

A (turning away, looking out the window), "I'm not going to hurt her. There's no problem."

B, "You have to get some help. You can't just stick your head in the sand."

A, "I'm not going to discuss anything with you when you get like this."

B, "Like what? It doesn't matter if I'm calm or frustrated, you won't talk to me about anything important."

A (quiet, tense, fidgeting)

B, "Well?"

A (gets up to leave), "I'm going outside to get some peace and quiet." (A leaves, then B leaves to follow him)

Lots of couples do this dance when they deal with difficult issues. One pursues and the other withdraws. Studies show that in most marriages, not all the time, men tend to withdrawal and women tend to pursue. That's because most men don't feel emotionally safe staying in an argument. And so women feel shut out, like their husbands don't care about the relationship. But often that's not the case, the husband does care, he just hates the conflict.

The book of Proverbs says the wise person enters into those difficult discussions.

Proverbs 15:31,

Whoever listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.

And we're to deal with it quickly. In Ephesians 4:26-27, Paul says,

Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

While we shouldn't take this passage literally and fear postponing a conflict to another day. Avoiding important discussions and leaving difficult issues unresolved gives Satan all kinds of room to mess with a marriage.

On a scale of 1-5 how do you rate?

Marriage is a wonderful thing when it's working well. The feeling of oneness with your mate is awesome. But it's not about chemistry and sexual attractiveness, it's about communication. It's about sharing your life with each other, not your teeth. And the communication that makes a marriage work well is possible for every single one of us. Let's obey God together and enjoy what he intended our marriages to be.