

Session 1

Strengthening Connection

Marriage is designed to be the closest possible relationship of increasing intimacy and growing interdependence. But this is not automatic, we have to keep working at our marriage if we're to stay closely connected.

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

— GENESIS 2:24

Session 1 – Strengthening Connection

CONVERSATION 1

5 minutes



THE FIRST TIME YOU MET

Tell each other your strongest memory of the first time you met and what first attracted you to one another.

Tending a vineyard

Four analogies for tending a marriage:

1. Adjusting

The early years of marriage require a lot of adjustment.

**We can change ourselves;
we can't change our partner.**

2. Pruning

As life gets busier, a key skill in marriage is prioritising our relationship (pruning back certain areas of our lives in order to prioritise another).

There may be pressures on our time from children, work or other demands on us.

We will only survive as a couple if we learn to prioritise our marriage relationship over every other demand on our time.



3. Supporting

Marriages need a support network (eg, friends and family).

We may face challenges from illness, infertility, finances, empty nest, elderly parent(s).

Supporting and encouraging each other is essential.

When we support each other, the very challenges we face can draw us closer together.

4. Renewing

Being prepared to talk about our own individual needs and desires.

Sharing with our partner our hopes for our future together.

Slowing down for long enough to decide on changes we'd like to make.

Possibly stopping certain activities in order to have more time together.

Starting something new that will strengthen or restore or renew the connection between us.



If you're struggling in your marriage, we want to encourage you that reconnecting is possible.

When couples have tended their relationship, things have changed dramatically and they go on to experience a new connection and intimacy.

CONVERSATION 2

5 minutes



WORKING THROUGH CHALLENGES

- Talk about any pressures and challenges you've worked through together in the past.
- What are the main pressures either or both of you are facing currently?
- Ask your partner, 'In what ways could I support you in working through this challenge?'

CONVERSATION 3

30 minutes



REVIEWING YOUR CONNECTION

Read through the list of statements and, using the scale below, write in the box the number that you feel corresponds to your viewpoint. Please do it on your own. When you have finished, follow the instructions on the opposite page.

0. never true 1. rarely true 2. occasionally true 3. usually true 4. always true

I feel that...

1. We give each other our undivided attention
2. We understand and support each other's beliefs and values
3. We show each other affection through demonstrative non-sexual touching
4. We are able to apologise and forgive when one of us has hurt the other
5. We listen to each other's point of view even when we disagree
6. We are able to talk about our sexual hopes and desires
7. We are able to talk about our hopes and dreams for the future
8. We are good at encouraging each other in what we each do
9. We make it a priority to go out together at least once a fortnight
10. We reflect on the good things we enjoy as a couple
11. We are able to talk about strong emotions such as excitement, hope, grief and anxiety
12. We are sensitive towards each other's sexual needs
13. We encourage each other's spiritual growth
14. We are good at meeting each other's emotional needs
15. We agree on our sexual practices
16. We discuss new ideas with each other
17. We support each other in the goals we have for our family life
18. We have a number of joint interests that we pursue together
19. We are both happy about the frequency of our lovemaking
20. We are good at listening to each other's feelings without interrupting or criticising

Results of reviewing your connection

1. Add up your scores from the statements on the opposite page as follows:

Statements about:	My score	Partner's score
Your friendship (statements 4, 8, 9, 14, 18)		
Your communication (statements 1, 5, 11, 16, 20)		
Your physical relationship (statements 3, 6, 12, 15, 19)		
Your future together (statements 2, 7, 10, 13, 17)		

2. Now discuss what you have each put, including any differences in your scores (the idea is to be understood by and to understand each other better).
3. Write something for each area that **you** could do to increase your scores:

Our friendship:

For example: *'I recognise the need for us to spend time together on our own.'*

Our communication:

For example: *'I obviously need to show you that I am interested in what you say.'*

Our physical relationship:

For example: *'I would like to be more sensitive towards your sexual desires.'*

Our future together:

For example: *'I would like to find a good time for us to have a conversation about our plans for the future.'*

When you have both finished, show each other what you have put.

Make time for each other

Making time for the people that matter most in our lives doesn't just happen; it requires a conscious decision to make it happen. If a relationship is to thrive and keep growing, we must have regular quality time together.

The benefits of a weekly date:

- keeps the fun and romance alive in our relationship
- deepens our understanding and appreciation of each other
- ensures we communicate regularly on a meaningful level

Plan to spend one to two hours alone together each week to rekindle romance, have fun and talk together about your feelings (your hopes, fears, worries, excitements).

It doesn't need to be expensive.

Golden rule:
Never change your date without consulting your partner.

How to make a weekly date happen:

Plan it into your calendar as you would a business appointment or social engagement

Prioritise it over all other activities (work, friends, sport, TV, children)

Protect it from external demands and pressures on your time, whether people, phones, social media

By doing so, we're saying to each other,
'You're the most important person to me,
and I'm giving you my full attention.'

CONVERSATION 4

5 minutes



SPECIAL TIMES TOGETHER

Tell your partner what have been the most special times you have shared together as a couple. Be specific. Talk about where and when those times were and what you were doing. Explain why they were special to you.

Nurture each other

Nurturing involves seeking to meet each other's emotional needs for affection, encouragement, support, comfort, etc.

It's as though there's an empty space inside that needs to be filled up with another person's love and attention

- when we're known intimately, when we're loved by another, we are no longer alone; the space inside is filled up
- the way to keep filling this space inside is by recognising and meeting each other's emotional needs

We are made for close relationships and we all have a longing to be known and to be loved by another person.

The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'

– GENESIS 2:18

How to nurture each other

In marriage we can either be reactive or proactive:

- being reactive is when we focus on each other's shortcomings
- being proactive involves focusing on each other's needs

Proactive behaviour draws us together because each of us feels loved. When we feel loved, we feel like loving.

Study each other and recognise each other's needs. Often our partner's needs and desires will be different to our own.

We can't assume our partner automatically knows our desires. We must tell each other.

**Discover what matters to your partner.
Otherwise, we tend to give what we like
to receive.**

Husbands... live with your wives in an understanding way.

– 1 PETER 3:7 (NASB)

CONVERSATION 5

10 minutes



KNOWING ME, KNOWING YOU

Please read through the list on the opposite page.

1. In column A, tick the three that matter most to you (that is, what you would most like your partner to give to you).

2. In column B, tick the three that you believe matter most to your partner (this is, what you think they would most like to receive from you).
NB: There is some overlap between the different desires – put those three which most clearly express your preferences.

3. When you have both finished, exchange your responses and see how well you understand your partner:
 - How close were you to selecting the three that matter most to your partner?
 - How many of the same desires did you and your partner put for yourselves? 0, 1, 2 or 3?
 - Consider which, if any, of the list of desires you tend to give least to your partner. Are these any of the three that matter most to your partner?




Session 1 – Strengthening Connection

	A Myself (choose 3)	B My partner (choose 3)
Affirmation – being appreciated for who you are by your partner		
Approval – being commended for those things you have done well		
Companionship – doing things together and sharing experiences		
Conversation – talking together about issues of interest and importance		
Encouragement – being inspired to keep going through your partner’s words		
Openness – being confident of your partner’s honesty about every aspect of their lives, including their feelings and ideas		
Physical affection – the communication of care and closeness through physical touch		
Practical help – experiencing your partner’s help in big or small tasks		
Presents – receiving tangible expressions of love and thoughtfulness		
Respect – having your ideas and opinions considered and valued by your partner		
Security – facing the future confident of your partner’s commitment to love you and stay with you		
Sexual intimacy – having regular opportunities to express and receive love through your sexual relationship		
Support – knowing your partner is working with you to fulfil your goals		
Time together – knowing your partner has set aside time to be with you on a regular basis		
Understanding – knowing your partner is aware of what matters to you		
Undivided attention – focusing on each other to the exclusion of any distractions		

Plan a date together

Be creative: your date doesn't have to look like anybody else's.

Experiment with different times. When could you have a date this week?

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
 Morning							
 Afternoon							
 Evening							

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

The thing that initially attracted me to you was...

(Complete in your partner's journal)



What interests do you have in common?

For example: *visiting art galleries, playing a sport, exploring new places, going to the cinema.*



It may be helpful to think back to some of the things you did when you first got together.

Is there a new interest that you could try doing together?

Think creatively around a new activity, or a sport, or a hobby you could take up together.

What do you enjoy doing separately?

Talk about whether you are allowing each other enough space to pursue these separate interests.

What I love about going on a date with you is...

For example: *time for deeper conversations, having fun, catching up on each other's news, getting to know you better.*



What could potentially prevent us having a weekly date?



Complete the following in your partner's journal

My dream date would be:



Save

Spend

Splurge

Conversation starter on your next date:

Look back to 'Knowing me, Knowing you' on pages 18–19 and ask each other, 'What could I do to meet your top three desires this week?'

