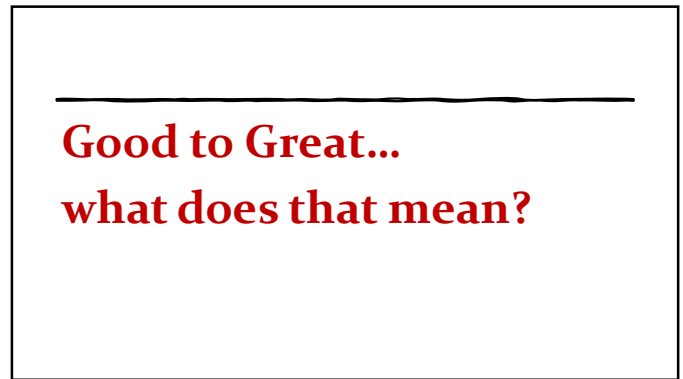
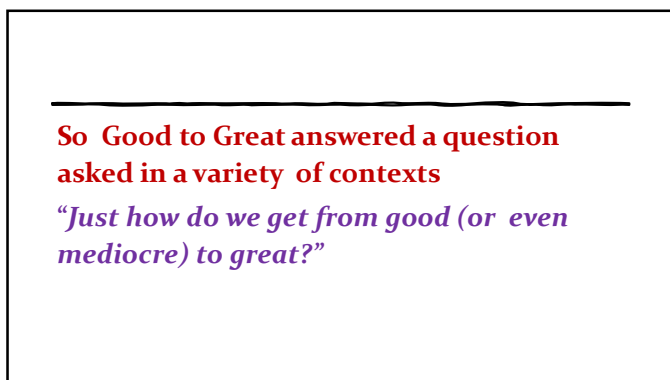




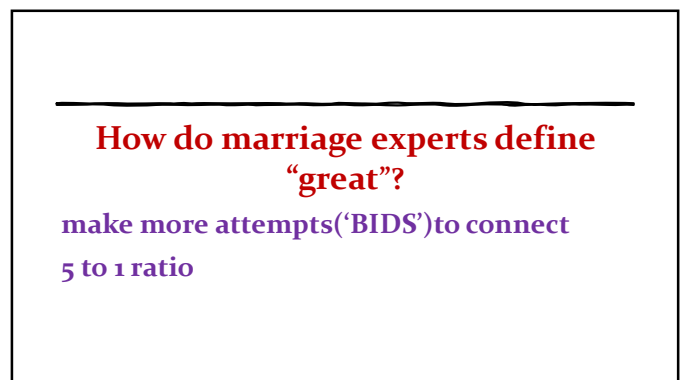
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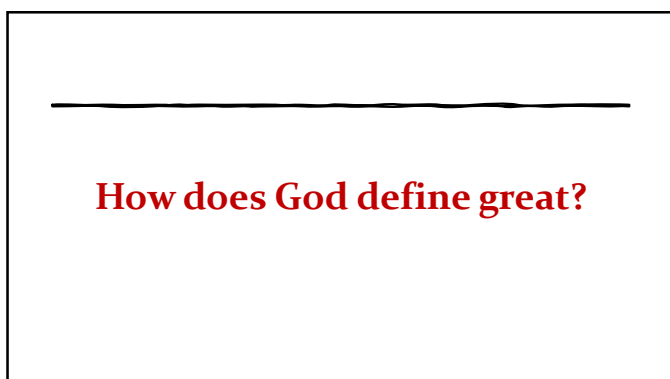
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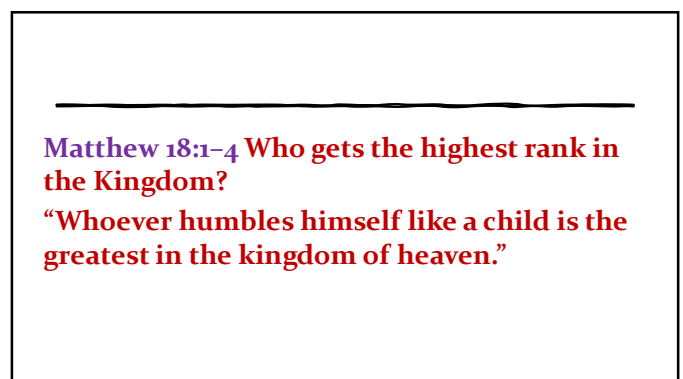
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4



5



6

The “who’s great” talk
Matthew 20
Humility and service

7

How do we have a great marriage ?

Collins wanted to know how any organization could move from “good to great”

We’ll explore five practices that can help your marriage move from good to great.

8

Five Practices

1. Faith-informed behavior
2. Pursue real intimacy
3. Learn to manage unsolvable problems
4. Do conflict well
5. Make repairs regularly

9

Faith-informed Behavior
Behavior aligned with God’s Word

10

To be a disciple of Jesus is, crucially, to be learning from Jesus how to do your job (marriage) as Jesus himself would do it.
-Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy

11

What about marriage?

Keeping Christ at the center and continuously work to apply all that Jesus lived and taught

Not power, control, status but
 love, servanthood, humility

12

It is not just asking

*“What makes a marriage work?” but
“How should we treat one another in light
of Christ?”*

13

In scripture, every command or instruction
about our behavior toward other's can be
applied to marriage.

14

Ephesians 5:15-33

- Live wisely, do good, don't live carelessly
or thoughtlessly
- Be filled with the Spirit
- Mutual submission
- Love & Respect
- Good to great starts in the heart.

15

1 Corinthians 13

Love is the polar opposite of self-seeking.

Self-centeredness blinds us to our own
selfishness; yet it makes us think we can see
our spouse clearly.

Love allows us to truly “serve” one another

16

Colossians 3: 14-16 ‘Dress Code’

...dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you:
compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength,
discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second
place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as
quickly and completely as the Master forgave you.
And regardless of what else you put on, wear love.
It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be
without it.

17

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Gratitude

“Thank God no matter what happens”

18

Two dynamics

Being personally responsible
Real conversations together

19

I am responsible and accountable

I have a **past** that manifests how I act or react in this present moment, yet I am fully responsible for what I say or do.

What guides my behavior? My correction?

What set of beliefs and principles determine my actions?

20

My task

Behave in a way that integrates and aligns my spiritual beliefs with my everyday interactions and guides my thoughts, emotions, and actions, particularly as it relates to my spouse and family.

This affirms that we are both spiritual and emotional beings.

21

We are spiritual and emotional beings

Faith in Christ gives me a sense of purpose, identity, peace, joy and belonging
it **does not** automatically produce emotional maturity or healthy habits.

Alignment is a process.

2 stories Hank, Mabel

22

Questions

- Am I acting for my spouse's good?
- Am I being honest and vulnerable?
- Am I responding with mercy and grace?
- Do I own my part of an issue?
- Am I willing to accept feedback, correction?
- Am I accountable for my actions?

23

Conversations together

The ability to work through issues honestly and effectively is almost as crucial to compatibility as love.

Marriage is never 50/50, so always bring peace, humility, empathy, patience, kindness. I assume I am responsible.

24

Manifests in 3 areas

Community: sharing experiences; unity
accountability, transformation

Covenant: commitment

Mission: God's call; giftedness; influence

25

Community (Acts 4)

About unity in Christ, sharing experiences,
trusting others and being vulnerable,
committed to each other and being
accountable.

Where transformation can happen.

26

Covenant

Commitment

*"What if God designed marriage to make us holy
more than to make us happy?"*

Couples that agree *"God is at the center of our
marriage"* are twice as likely to be at the highest
level of happiness.

27

Mission

What has God called us to be/do?

How will we use our gifts, our talents, our
resources, our experiences?

Who is in our circle of influence?

28

*To be a disciple of Jesus is, crucially, to be
learning from Jesus how to do our
marriage as He himself would do it.*

Mabel's story

29

Questions

Do we seek to love, value, honor and serve each
other?

Do either feel controlled, ignored, diminished?

Do I receive your words with respect and
acceptance.

Do our interactions reflect our faith?

How can we encourage one another?

How can we practice gratitude?

30

Real Intimacy

31

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

-C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

32

A definition

The gradual development of understanding and appreciation for another person by listening, discussing, sharing, and being mutually involved. It can exist in several realms, not just the physical; one can be intimate and not physical.

33

**But physical touch is awesome,
releases oxytocin.**

*“I see you, I hear you, I touch you,
I know you’re there”*

34

We are God’s image bearers

Created in His image as relational beings, with a deep need for relational intimacy...

- motivated by caring involvement
- characterized by deeply knowing and being known

35

Intimacy

- fully sharing one’s real self, flaws and all
- tuning into someone else’s reality, and risking being changed by that experience
- feeling safe in someone’s presence and being accepted in your rawest form.

36

We all want what real intimacy offers:
 deep love, closeness and acceptance
 safe place to be ourselves (w/o changing)
 physical and emotional needs met
 validation (feeling valued, respected)

37

Yet, many seldom experience true intimacy
 since it can only develop through the
 vulnerability of self-disclosure.
 We'll explore some reasons why, but, more
 importantly, how to have the kind of
 intimacy God intended for each of us.

38

Caveat

True intimacy cannot exist in unhealthy
 relationships--too much hiding, fear and deceit.
 All the unhealthy or toxic behaviors result from
 the inability to be intimate.

Why? The reluctance to change, the fear self-
 discovery or having others discover the real us (so
 we wear masks). Marriage is a revealer!

39

We have needs

Our willingness to risk the vulnerability
 intimacy requires determines whether these
 needs will be met.

A partner must understand these needs and
 be willing and able to meet them

We must be able to express them well (2 tasks)

40

'Needing' others can feel risky. So, we avoid
 appearing needy at all costs and hope...
 Experiencing real intimacy can only occur
 when we allow a partner to see us as we are.
 To do this, we must 'peak inside' and let
 partner do the same.

41

Paradoxically, we can only truly know
 ourselves when we allow ourselves to be
 deeply known by others. Mirror
 And intimate relationships prepare us for
 intimacy with God.

42

So, why is real intimacy so uncommon?

43

FEAR—fear of vulnerability, rejection, abandonment or fear of losing one's independence or having to change.

These fears can create emotional walls that prevent us from fully opening up to others; so, we wear masks.

44

One primary cause of fear is **past** experiences of hurt, abuse or neglect...

leads to self-protection, mistrust, feeling unsafe and a reluctance to change or become vulnerable; many learned early on that closeness can lead to pain.

45

Real intimacy happens when my desire for closeness and connection is stronger than my fears, pride or self-protection.

Past trauma can hinder this.

46

Five keys to intimacy

- **Trust and respect** (trusting and being trustworthy)
- **Authenticity** (knowing/embracing who we are; self-awareness; commitment to real self)
- **Disclosure** (vulnerability; willingly revealing my true self to another)

47

-
- **Acceptance** (accept and trust who we are and who they are-at the moment)
 - **Servanthood** (reaching out to serve another vs. serving myself)

48

Trust is the foundation of a healthy marriage.
 Without it, there is no vulnerability;
 without vulnerability, there is no sharing or growth

49

Trust creates a secure environment where we feel free to express feelings, fears, and dreams without fear of being dismissed or punished.
Trust must go both ways.

50

Authenticity is about being genuine, honest and congruent with who you are-your thoughts and feelings.
 It is representing yourself truthfully
 It begins by knowing oneself well.
 Asking, "Am I being real with you?"

51

Disclosure is revealing the truth about ourselves to another
 invariably increases vulnerability,
 without it, relationships stagnate and stay superficial, and needs are left unfulfilled.
 Wear a mask, feel safe, but no real intimacy.

52

Disclosure is acknowledging that we can be petty, envious, fearful, capable of selfishness and rage and that our spouse is likely the same, and that being in relationship with them is accepting the reality of those imperfections.

53

Healthy intimacy requires both.
Authenticity: being real, living that out
Disclosure: choosing to share my inner self with someone; deciding what to reveal, honestly, openly

54

Self-acceptance is being at home in one's inner world. Too much, we become self-centered; too little, victims or martyrs. It is trusting and accepting one's brokenness; that trust is not dependent on anyone else.

55

Without this , it's nearly impossible to know, love and trust someone else or have them truly know or love us

56

Servanthood demands that we are present with someone and willing to move beyond ourselves. It requires us to think more of others than of self (1 Corinth. 13). It's dealing with our self-centeredness and typically involves some form of "emotional" stretching.

57

Necessary prerequisites (5)

safety to feel free enough to let go (take off the masks) and be oneself
awareness of your inner experience in the moment
courage and openness to share what you're feeling with someone who also shares intimate feelings with you.

58

willingness to risk revealing who you are, and to risk facing who the other person is in their entirety-not just the safe parts, or ones we like or the ones in some way "useful" to us.

59

mutual and honest expression of all parts of one's life: selfishness, anger, worry, elation, sorrow and other emotions, as well as one's aspirations, dreams and doubts.

We can **only do this** when we are fully present, fully alive, fully real and fully available.

60

My non- negotiables

Being fully present in the moment

Being curious

Being vulnerable

61

Outcomes

When we fear/avoid real intimacy:

we hide, distract, self-protect

we build walls that prevent us from becoming self-aware and open to others.

62

What's needed is courage and awareness that empowers us to let go of fear, and to risk being real, vulnerable and to share ourselves, both our fears and needs.

63

When we are aware, present and honest, partners know they can trust us and the relationship deepens.

Awareness is only half of an intimate relationship.

64

The other half: being openly curious, non-judgmental and genuinely interested in who your partner really is.

65

Intimacy thrives when two people know themselves, share themselves, know and accept each other without judgment and are fully present in the moment.

66

TALK TIME

67

MANAGING UNSOLVABLES

68

When you marry someone, you marry a particular set of unsolvable problems you will work on for the next 10-20-30 years.

69

Nearly 70% of the issues you will struggle with will be unsolvable or perpetual.

70

Marriage inevitably brings a particular set of challenges — differences in values, expectations, personality, backgrounds, experiences, and ways of thinking — that you and your partner will have to learn to manage.

71

What makes a problem unsolvable?

They are rooted in enduring differences; identity, not behavior.

They reflect lifelong traits (personality, temperament, FOO, preferences), not temporary habits.

72

Examples of perpetual problems

- One partner is habitually running behind; the other wants to be early.
- One partner is more of a spender, the other is a saver
- One partner is more extraverted, the other more introverted

73

-
- One partner wants more we-time and the other wants more me-time
 - One partner is more spiritually involved; the other is less or not.
 - One partner wants sex more frequently than the other

74

The danger

Two people with differing ideas, experiences and wants competing for resources:
can drop into a right-wrong mindset
think 'true love' should mean no problems
fail to see differences as opportunities for intimacy

75

Here's the problem

No quick fix or easy solutions
It often brings out the worst in us
We don't rise to the level of our expectations;
we fall to the level of our training
Easy to get stuck in one-dimensional thinking

76

Reality: there will be problems, so...
recognize your rigid, **myopic** way of looking at them (filter called me!!)
find healthy ways of managing (not fixing) the problems our differences create.
Managing, what is it?

77

Managing?

- Finding common ground instead of me vs. you, win-lose, quick fixes.
- Listening well to understand
- Finding peace, serving one's spouse, caring
- Letting go of being right or having our way

78

-
- Sharing wants and needs; mutual submission
 - Finding meaning; what God is trying to teach
 - Being curious, listening, accepting

79

-
- Validating spouses' perspective
 - Focusing on how we want the marriage to be, not about changing our partner.
 - Aligning our nervous systems.
 - Regulating our emotions; optimal arousal

80

Self—regulation

Ability to notice, manage and intentionally respond to your emotions, impulses and behavior rather than being controlled by them.

81

Asking, “what’s going on inside right now?”

Recognizing our emotions and behaviors and how they affect us/our partner.

Controlling them to be able to respond thoughtfully and respectfully to foster empathy and reduce conflict.

82

How? Take your “pulse”

- Looking inward for any need to control, dominate or be right.
- Learning how to handle and embrace discomfort/pain with humility.
- Pausing before reacting to avoid escalation.

83

-
- Staying calm during disagreements to listen and understand.
 - Channeling emotions into constructive communication.
 - Willing to live/love/be OK in the GAP
 - Optimal arousal

84

Optimal arousal

- Problems, conflict, disagreements, unmet needs can lead to heightened emotional arousal
- We call this hyperarousal
- Optimal arousal is the sweet spot.
- 20 minutes

85

Reality

Problems cannot be easily or painlessly solved at the level they were created.

They are buried in our genes, past experiences, observations and emotional makeup.

That mix of differences can create tension

86

Marriages don't fail due to the presence of perpetual issues, but the *mismanagement* of them.

It is seldom big things, but lots of little "misses" that can derail a marriage.

87

Attempts to "fix" nearly always leads to gridlock, resentment, or emotional shutdown and the conflict feels like a threat to the relationship's future.

88

Gridlock

When couples don't manage unsolvable issues

- One or both feel rejected by partner.
- Discussions lead to dead ends, no headway.
- Both become entrenched in their position and unwilling to budge or be flexible.

89

-
- Discussing the subject invariably leads to frustration and hurt.
 - Conversations about the problem lack grace, humor, amusement, or affection.

90

-
- Neither accepts their partner's influence, meaning they do not allow their partner's needs or perspective to influence their position on the issue.

Stuck, now what?

91

Getting Unstuck

Stop trying to "fix" the problem

Perpetual problems become more frustrating with each attempt to fix them, so stop looking for a solution (fix).

Accept that the problem isn't something you can make go away.

92

Acceptance doesn't mean giving up. It just means seeing the issue for what it is.

Clarity comes when we stop asking, "*How are we going to fix this?*" and ask, "*What can we learn from this?*" *How can this deepen our relationship?*" "*What is God teaching us?*"

93

Build a framework for honest dialogue

Create a safe space of mutual respect, validating each's dreams, feelings, needs focusing on how we talk/share/relate (not the problem)

listening well to fully understand what the other wants and needs.

94

Explore how to discuss the issue

Every relationship issue is two problems: the actual problem and how we address it.

Satisfaction is not related to the actual issue, but rather how we discuss and manage the issue.

95

Identify patterns

If you keep coming back to the same issues, look for the pattern; **ex:** a topic that never seems to resolve itself.

Identifying a pattern can help create awareness of what drags every conversation back to the same issue.

96

Identify the core issue

What need is unmet or issue not addressed.
 Slow down and get curious.
 Ask about the dreams behind the issue.
 Sometimes it's a story from childhood.
 Other times it's an unlive goal.
 Spend time here

97

Learn to honor & validate differences

As dreams or unexpressed issues/ needs/ wants are explored, validate and honor each.
 This doesn't mean tacit agreement but honoring your partner.
 Embracing differences is an act of love.

98

Be open to digging deeper

Don't stop the conversation, keep asking questions and searching together.
 It's discovering more about each other, not trying to solve something or change someone.

99

Here's how to start

- Encourage each other to express their unmet needs and listen without judgment or criticism
- Learn how to soothe each other when emotions become overwhelming (20 minutes)

100

-
- Define areas of compromise
 - Talk through and understand the GAP and decide (not slide) to embrace it.

101

-
- Too many couples 'slide' through issues or life experiences rather than deciding who they are and where they intend to go.
 - Choose how to support each other's dreams and how to serve each other in the GAP.

102

Couples who thrive don't try to *solve everything*—they stop fighting reality and learn to how to self-manage and to live gracefully with their differences.

103

Some helpful questions

1. Are there any core beliefs that you hold around your position on this topic?
2. Is there a meaningful story behind this? Maybe something from your childhood or other past experiences?
3. Why is this issue important to you?
4. What is your ideal dream here?

104

TALK TIME

105

DOING CONFLICT WELL

106

Never think your spouse *shouldn't* be hurt or upset by something that wouldn't hurt you.

107

It is not that we have difficult conversations in our relationships; those conversations are the relationship.

108

Here's what we know

Marital conflict is inevitable.
 Most people hate/fear conflict.
 Few learned how to handle conflict well
 and tend to repeat their parent's style.
 Most have no clue how to communicate
 their anger or displeasure in a healthy way.

109

Most fights are really protests over feeling
 emotionally disconnected.
 "Do I matter?" "Do you care?"

110

Conflict activates your brain's 'salience
 system', making it harder to think/react
 clearly or in healthy manner.

It automatically assesses threats and
 triggers your instinctive reaction (fight,
 flight or freeze).

111

The problem is seldom the 'problem'

The 'real' problem

- typically, something unsaid, perhaps not fully known.
- not what you are arguing over, but inability to recruit one another as resources in dealing with it.

112

inability to

- manage one's own anxiety when things escalate or begin falling apart.
- control one's emotions

People are never the problem

What to do: INQUIRE (look at deep feelings)

113

What is conflict?

Conflict is an opportunity

For growth, healing, connection or clarity

Ignored or mishandled, it becomes destructive

How conflict is viewed determines what happens next.

114

The real key is **how** conflict is managed.
 Managed well it can strengthen a marriage
 Conflict does not have to become combat,
 but it often does.

Think: in what direction do your conflicts
 typically go?

115

Avoiding conflict **backfires** because bottling
 up negative thoughts and feelings doesn't
 give your partner a chance to understand or
 change their behavior.

Same arguments persist.

116

How were you trained

Most have been trained to see conflict as

- combat, win or lose
- a personal attack on their character.
- a need to dominate or win or to avoid at all costs.

How do you see it?

117

Causes

Conflict is most often about competing or
 unmet needs, or a lack of emotional
 responsiveness.

Over time, frustration builds; **anger** always
 has a voice (but it's typically acted out, not
 verbalized).

118

Even when poorly presented, it's a **bid** for
 closeness, connection, or understanding a
 deep need.

That means listen, be curious, pause
 defensiveness, give grace, look for the
 message under the conflict.

119

Conflict simply means that you are still
 engaged; still trying to connect and
 frustrated; with competing needs.

It seldom 'feels' that way

120

Conflict or collision

We have different or incompatible needs, and different skills at handling those differences
 Some are better at listening/communicating (calmly) what they need.
 Something is missed, neglected, misunderstood, taken for granted.
 Time to talk or escalate...

121

Collisions happen

No neutral conversations
 Strong emotions; escalation
 Poor communication of needs
 Ineffective methods; no self-regulating
 Behind the feelings is something that has not been disclosed or addressed.

122

Reasons

- We don't really listen well
- We are self-absorbed, selfish or fearful
- We don't control our emotions
- We don't speak needs clearly; behind(-) feelings are unmet, unexpressed needs
- Need to win, control, retaliate

123

We operate in a semiconscious state based on childhood training (we assume things) "men don't care" "women are never satisfied" "I never get my way"

We never challenge our assumptions

What unhealthy beliefs or expectations do you need to challenge?

124

What is your conflict style (list)

It's always more important than the topic
 Criticism always leads to defensiveness
 Reframe the cycle from criticism to complaint; from character attack to vulnerable need.
*When you don't help it means you don't care about me vs.
 When I feel alone with responsibilities, I get anxious and resentful, I need to know we are a team, that you care.*

125

Change how you do conflict

Recognize your "automatic" response pattern (fight, flight, or freeze)

Pause, take a breath, regulate (get Optimal)

Change your preconceived notion about conflict; you are not enemies; not win-lose.

126

Assume it's about your issues first, then investigate.

Remind yourself that your partner is someone you love and value; who also wants to solve things.

Reframe conflict as opportunity to connect

127

- **Turn** emotions into (neutral) words

- **Listen** and understand before reacting

- **Attack** the problem, not the person

- **Decide** what outcome you want. "What's my goal?" "Will we be closer after this?"

128

Healthy Conflict

- Starts with a soft vs. hard start-up
- Involves active listening and curiosity
- Remembers this is a person you love
- Respectful, constructive communication
- Maintains a 5-1 ratio

129

- Pauses, seeks to understand

- De-escalates

- Not fighting to win; fighting **for** the relationship.

- Uses I statements

- Owns your part

130

Healthy conflict

transforms relationships by inviting honesty and vulnerability, encouraging deeper intimacy.

provides a pathway to understanding, creating a shared language where both voices and feelings matter.

strengthens trust and opens pathways for growth.

131

intentionally navigates conflicts with love and respect to build trust, bonding.

transforms conflict from a destructive force to a constructive tool in deepening your connection.

132

Here is the secret

- Conflict is not the problem, managing it well is.
- The key is to maintain a 5 to 1 ratio
- Learn how to regulate emotions and de-escalate hyperarousal
- Work through any pursuer-distancer issues

133

Four horseman

- Criticism vs. complaint
- Contempt
- Defensiveness
- Stonewalling

134

Habits to form

- Stay emotionally regulated
- Speak respectfully
- Listen to understand, not rebut
- Take responsibility for your contribution
- Repair after the conflict

135

TALK TIME

136

Conflict rules

- Communicate clearly and calmly using “I” statements to express feelings without blame.
- Whoever brings it up first says what they need, not what the other did wrong
- Not relitigating old fights. Stay on today’s issue only
- Listen to understand; practice active listening

137

- Assume good intentions rather than jumping to accusations.
- If either of us is too heated to talk, we name a time to come back, not ‘later’
- Identify the real issue; surface arguments often hide deeper needs or fears—recognizing these prevents recurring fights.
- Focus on the problem, not the person

138

-
- We never go to bed still upset. But talking it out isn't the goal, naming the need is.
 - Take breaks when needed; brief time-outs prevent escalation and hyperarousal.
 - Apologies come with change, not just words.
 - If we're stuck, we ask, "what would this look like if we were on the same team" OUT LOUD.

139

REPAIR

140

**Healthy couples are not conflict-free;
they repair quickly.**

141

**Successful repair attempts are one of the
strongest predictors of long-term marital
stability.**

**Not because healthy couples never fight—but
because they know how to come back to
connection quickly.**

142

**Our intent doesn't trump or
erase the impact**

**The goal is to protect the marriage, not
yourself**

143

Repair attempt

**Any statement, action, small word or gesture,
silly or otherwise—designed to de-escalate
tension, reconnect emotionally, or stop a conflict
—that prevents negativity from escalating out of
control.**

**Anything that helps us shift from "me vs. you" to
"us vs. the problem."**

144

It doesn't have to be perfect, poetic, or dramatic.

It just has to signal: *"I care more about us than about winning this argument."*

Hard truth: it is not a dialogue; you are tending to your partner not starting a conversation.

145

Examples

Humor: a gentle joke, playful comment, or light moment

Acknowledgment: "You're right, this is important"

Taking responsibility: "I shouldn't have said it that way."

Soothing gestures: reaching for a hand, softening tone, or offering a hug.

146

Time-outs: "I want to keep talking, but I need a minute to calm down."

Reframing: "We're on the same team. Let's figure this out together."

Curiosity: "Help me understand what you're feeling."

147

Simple repair phrases

"That came out harsher than I meant."

"I can see why that hurt."

"Can we restart?"

"You are not the problem, this is."

"What did you hear me say?"

148

Important reality

Healthy sustainable relationships are not built on endless self-sacrifice (one-sided martyrdom).

They're built on two regulated nervous systems that take turns caring for each other—and themselves.

149

Forgiveness or 'sorry' are not repair. Forgiveness addresses the offence; repair addresses the relationship.

'Explaining' an argument is not repair

Apology without change soon becomes hollow, worthless.

150

Repair rules

- **Tend to the relationship**
- **Built on actions:** pauses, gentleness, new communication habits, shared strategies.
- **Ask what would help repair it (what do you need from me right now)**

151

-
- **Acknowledge the disconnect** — loneliness, withdrawal, resentment, or repeated conflict.
 - **Stop the escalation;** prioritize getting your nervous systems regulated
 - **Own your part,** share your wounds, concerns

152

-
- **Create safety**
 - **Validate the hurt;** show empathy
 - **Apologize specifically** (identify the behavior you intend to change)

153

-
- **Make and receive emotional bids** for connection, touch, warmth
 - **Speak your needs** without attacking each other; use 'I' messages
 - **Point is to understand** not win. Assume the best

154

-
- **Take as much time as needed;** no sweeping under the rug
 - **Make a commitment** to change
 - **Look for the deeper meaning,** the spiritual lesson. What is this trying to teach us?

155

Challenge

156