

WORKBOOK

WITH BIBLICAL REFERENCES

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• *building strong marriages* •

— PARENTING VERSION —



COUPLE'S WORKBOOK

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* Recommended Couple Exercises



SHARING STRENGTH AND GROWTH AREAS

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control . . . — GALATIANS 5:22-23

Check what areas you agree or disagree most with your partner.

- **Select three Strength Areas** (most agreement and positive aspects of your relationship)
- **Select three Growth Areas** (most disagreement and areas you want to improve)

	STRENGTH AREAS	GROWTH AREAS
1. COUPLE COMMUNICATION <i>We share feelings and understand each other.</i>		
2. COUPLE CONFLICT <i>We are able to discuss and resolve differences.</i>		
3. PARTNER STYLE AND HABITS <i>We appreciate each other's personality and habits.</i>		
4. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT <i>We agree on budget and financial matters.</i>		
5. CHILDREN AND PARENTING <i>We agree on issues related to raising children.</i>		
6. FAMILY SPIRITUAL BELIEFS <i>We actively involve our family in developing spirituality.</i>		
7. CONFIDENCE IN PARENTING <i>We feel good about our ability to parent our children.</i>		
8. FAMILY COMMUNICATION <i>Our family exhibits healthy communication.</i>		
9. FAMILY SATISFACTION <i>We are a happy family and enjoy being together.</i>		

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

1. Take turns sharing what each of you perceive as your relationship strengths. Verbally share one strength at a time, until you each have shared three.
2. Use the same procedure to share and discuss growth areas.
3. Now have a discussion around these questions:
 - a. Did any of your partner's responses surprise you?
 - b. In what areas did you mostly agree with your partner?
 - c. In what areas did you mostly disagree with your partner?



COMMUNICATION

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. — JAMES 1:19

ASSERTIVENESS AND ACTIVE LISTENING

ASSERTIVENESS:

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in the relationship.

Assertiveness is a valuable communication skill. In successful couples, both individuals tend to be quite assertive. Rather than assuming their partner can read their minds, they share how they feel and ask clearly and directly for what they want.

Assertive individuals take responsibility for their messages by using “I” statements. They avoid statements beginning with “you.” In making constructive requests, they are positive and respectful in their communication. They use polite phrases such as “please” and “thank you”.

Examples of Assertive Statements:

“I’m feeling out of balance. While I love spending time with you, I also want to spend time with my friends. I would like us to find some time to talk about this.”

“I want to take a ski vacation next winter, but I know you like to go to the beach. I’m feeling confused about what choice we should make.”

ACTIVE LISTENING:

Active listening is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.

Good communication depends on you carefully listening to another person. Active listening involves listening attentively without interruption and then restating what was heard. Acknowledge content AND the feelings of the speaker. The active listening process lets the sender know whether or not the message they sent was clearly understood by having the listener restate what they heard.

Examples of Active Listening:

“I heard you say you are feeling ‘out of balance’, and enjoy the time we spend together but that you also need more time to be with your friends. You want to plan a time to talk about this.”

“If I understand what you said, you are concerned because you want to go skiing next winter. But you think I would rather to go to the beach. Is that correct?”

When each person knows what the other person feels and wants (assertiveness) and when each knows they have been heard and understood (active listening), intimacy is increased. These two communication skills can help you grow closer as a couple.



COMMUNICATION

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. — PSALM 19:14*

CREATING A WISH LIST

In this exercise, you will each individually make a Wish List of things you would like more or less of in your relationship. Next, take turns sharing your Wish Lists with each other.

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in your relationship.

Active listening is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.

In sharing your Wish List with your partner, you will be demonstrating your Assertiveness skills. In giving feedback to your partner about their Wish List, you will be demonstrating your Active Listening skills.

Make a Wish List of three things you would like more or less of in your relationship.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

Take turns sharing your Wish List with each other.

SPEAKER'S JOB:

1. Speak for yourself ("I" statements e.g. "I wish...")
2. Describe how you would feel if your wish came true.

LISTENER'S JOB:

1. Repeat/summarize what you have heard.
2. Describe the wish AND how your partner would feel if the wish came true.

After completing the Wish List Exercise, discuss the following questions:

How good were each of you at being assertive?

In what ways did you each effectively use active listening skills?



COMMUNICATION

Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing. — PROVERBS 12:18

DAILY DIALOGUE AND DAILY COMPLIMENTS

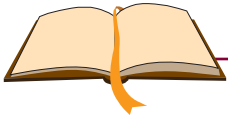
Daily Dialogue is an intentional effort to talk about your relationship, rather than discussing your activities that day. The focus of this dialogue should be on your feelings about each other and your lives together. Set aside five minutes per day to discuss the following:

- *What did you most enjoy about your relationship today?*
- *What was dissatisfying about your relationship today?*
- *How can you be helpful to each other?*

Daily Compliments help you focus on the positive things you like about each other. Every day give your partner at least one genuine compliment. These can be general (“*you are fun to be with*”) or specific (“*I appreciate that you were on time for the concert*”).

• COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO INCREASE INTIMACY •

1. **Give full attention to your partner when talking.** Turn off the phone, shut off the television, make eye contact.
2. **Focus on the good qualities in each other and often praise each other.**
3. **Be assertive.** Share your thoughts, feelings, and needs.
A good way to be assertive without being critical is to use “I” rather than “You” statements. (e.g. “*I worry when you don’t let me know you’ll be late*” rather than “*You are always late*”).
4. **Avoid criticism.**
5. **If you must criticize, balance it with at least one positive comment.**
(e.g. “*I appreciate how you take the trash out each week. In the future can you remember to also wheel the trash can back from the end of the driveway?*”).
6. **Listen to understand, not to judge.**
7. **Use active listening.** Summarize your partner’s comments before sharing your own reactions or feelings.
8. **Avoid blaming each other and work together for a solution.**
9. **Use the Ten Steps approach.** For problems that come up again and again, use the *Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict*.
10. **Seek counseling.** If you are not able to resolve issues, seek counseling before they become more serious.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT COMMUNICATION

PSALM 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

PROVERBS 17:27 A truly wise person uses few words; a person with understanding is even tempered.

PROVERBS 12:18 Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.

MATTHEW 7:3 And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?

PROVERBS 20:19 A gossip goes around telling secrets, so don't hang around with chatterers.

JAMES 1:19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

PROVERBS 18:13 Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

TEN STEPS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

All couples have differences and disagreements. Studies show the amount of disagreements are not related to marital happiness as much as how they are handled. Happy couples do not avoid disagreements; they resolve them while remaining respectful of each other, thereby strengthening their relationship. This Ten Step Model is a simple, but effective way to resolve conflict while avoiding the common and destructive patterns. Use this model with an ongoing issue in your relationship, as well as future issues.

1. Set a time and place for discussion.

2. Define the problem - Be specific.

3. List the ways you each contribute to the problem.

Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

4. List past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful.

1) _____ 3) _____

2) _____ 4) _____

5. Brainstorm—Pool your new ideas and try to list 10 possible solutions to the problem. Do not judge or criticize any of the suggestions at this point.

1) _____ 6) _____

2) _____ 7) _____

3) _____ 8) _____

4) _____ 9) _____

5) _____ 10) _____

6. Discuss and evaluate each of these possible solutions. (Be as objective as possible. Talk about how useful and appropriate each suggestion feels for resolving your issue.)

7. Agree on one solution to try.

8. Agree how you will each work toward this solution. (Be as specific as possible.)

Partner 1: _____

Partner 2: _____

9. Set up another meeting to discuss your progress.

Place: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

10. Reward each other for progress. (If you notice your partner making a positive contribution toward the solution, praise his/her effort.)



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. — 1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

HOW TO TAKE A TIME-OUT

Some conflicts become heated as levels of anger and frustration rise. Rather than speaking assertively, partners begin to accuse, criticize, or yell. Rather than listening actively, partners interrupt, belittle, and ignore. Physiologically, the “fight or flight” response is triggered as each person goes into a protection mode with little or no regard for their partner. In this state of escalation, it is not uncommon to say or do things we later regret. Moreover, it is nearly impossible to have a productive conversation leading to a mutually agreed upon resolution. This is when a “time-out” can be beneficial. A time-out provides couples with an opportunity to cool down, identify their feelings and needs, and begin to think productively again about how to approach the issues they face.

1. RECOGNIZE your need for a time-out. Are your fists clenched? Is your face red? Are you breathing fast? Are the tears streaming down your face? Do you feel like screaming or throwing something? Are you afraid of your partner’s intensity? Do you feel emotionally closed off?

- Learn to recognize the signs that things have become too intense for you to have a productive interaction with your partner.
- What physical and emotional reactions indicate you need a time-out?

2. REQUEST THE TIME-OUT. Call a time-out for yourself by saying something like “I’m just too angry to talk right now; I need to take a time-out. Please give me an hour to calm down and gather my thoughts.”

- Remember to call the time-out for yourself. It is seldom helpful to tell the other person “You need a time-out!” Suggest a time when you think you’ll be ready to resume.

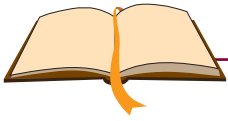
3. RELAX AND CALM DOWN. Take some deep breaths. Go for a jog. Take a walk or a bath. Write in your journal. Read, pray, or watch television for a while.

- Do something that will help you relax and recover from the emotional intensity.
- What method(s) could you use to calm down?

4. REMEMBER WHAT’S IMPORTANT.

- Try to identify what you were thinking and feeling that became so difficult to discuss.
- Think about “I” messages you could use to tell your partner what you were thinking or feeling, and what you need from him/her.
- Try to spend some quiet time considering your partner’s point of view and what they are feeling.
- Remember the two of you are a team, and the only way your relationship will “win” is if you work toward a solution that both individuals can feel good about.

5. RESUME THE CONVERSATION. Bring in the skills of Assertiveness and Active Listening and/or the Ten Steps for Conflict Resolution. These structured skills can help contain the intensity as you attempt to resolve a conflict. Honor your commitment to return to the issue when you are ready to have a more productive conversation.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT CONFLICT RESOLUTION

COLOSSIANS 3:19 Husbands love your wives and never treat them harshly.

EPHESIANS 4:26 And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry.

PROVERBS 14:29 People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.

ECCLESIASTES 7:8-9 ⁸ Finishing is better than starting. Patience is better than pride. ⁹ Control your temper, for anger labels you a fool.

ROMANS 12:19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the Lord.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

ROMANS 12:17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.

2 TIMOTHY 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

PROVERBS 17:9 Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.

GALATIANS 5:22-23 ²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

COLOSSIANS 3:13 Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

⁹ Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. ¹⁰ Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine. — PROVERBS 3:9-10

FINANCIAL GOALS

Couples argue about finances more than any other topic. Regardless of how much or how little money a couple has, deciding what to purchase and how to spend their money is problematic for most couples.

Typically, most couples focus on only short-term financial goals like: “Today I will pay \$100 on my credit card bill.” But short-term goals should also take into consideration your long-term goals like: “We want to save enough to make a down payment on a house.”

One way to reduce the amount of conflict regarding finances is for you and your partner to discuss and decide on your short-term and long-term financial goals. Setting common goals as a couple can increase your sense of teamwork and collaboration in this complex area of finances.

Identifying and Deciding on Your Financial Goals

Each person should individually brainstorm their short-term and long-term financial goals and then share them with each other. Short-term goals should be what you can achieve in six months to one year. Long term goals might be achieved from one to five years. Remember, your goals should be realistic, clear and specific.

Short-Term Goals: (six months to one year)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Long-Term Goals: (one to five years)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

- Share your lists with one another. What do they have in common?
- Where are they different?
- Decide together as a couple on your common goals.
- Talk about how you can each contribute to achieving these goals.
- Revisit them from time to time so you stay on track.



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

BUDGET WORKSHEET

MONTHLY INCOME: (Take Home Pay)			
		Total Partner 1:	
		Total Partner 2:	
		TOTAL COUPLE:	
MONTHLY EXPENSES		Current Spending	Future Budget Plan
GIVING	Contributions/Tithe:		
HOUSING	Rent or Mortgage:		
	Utilities:		
	Phone:		
LOANS/DEBT	Auto:		
	Personal:		
	Credit Cards:		
CAR	Gasoline:		
	Repairs/Maintenance:		
FOOD	Food at home:		
	Food away from home:		
HEALTH CARE			
INSURANCE	Medical:		
	Car:		
	Home/Life/Health:		
CLOTHING			
PERSONAL GOODS			
HOUSEHOLD SUPPLIES			
SERVICES	Cell phone:		
	Cable/Dish:		
	Internet:		
	Dry Cleaning/Laundry:		
	Other:		
OTHER EXPENDITURES	Savings:		
	Gifts:		
	Entertainment:		
	Daycare:		
	Child support:		
	Other:		
TOTAL COUPLE INCOME:			
TOTAL EXPENSES:			
SURPLUS OR DEFICIT:			



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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THE MEANING OF MONEY

Use the 1-5 scale to respond to each of the statements below:

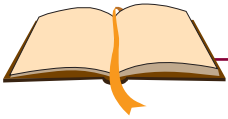
- _____ 1. I look up to people who have been very financially successful.
- _____ 2. In making a major purchase, I consider what others will think of my choice.
- _____ 3. Having high quality things reflects well on me.
- _____ 4. It is important for me to maintain a lifestyle similar to or better than that of my peers.
- _____ 5. Having some money in savings is very important to me.
- _____ 6. I would rather have extra money in the bank than some new purchase.
- _____ 7. I prefer safe investing with a moderate return versus high-risk investing with potentially high returns.
- _____ 8. I feel more secure when I know we have enough money for our bills.
- _____ 9. I really enjoy shopping and buying new things.
- _____ 10. People who have more money have more fun.
- _____ 11. I really enjoy spending money on myself and on others.
- _____ 12. Money can't buy happiness, but it sure helps.
- _____ 13. He or she who controls the purse strings calls the shots.
- _____ 14. I would be uncomfortable putting all my money into a joint account.
- _____ 15. One of the important benefits of money is the ability to influence others.
- _____ 16. I think we each should control the money we earn.

Scoring and interpretation: After taking the quiz, add up your answers to the four questions for each category and record your scores below. Scores for each category can range from 4 to 20, with a high score indicating more agreement with that approach. It is possible to have high or low scores in more than one category. General guidelines for interpreting your scores appear in the box below.

Category	Add Items	Your Score	Interpretation of Score	Score	Interpretation
Money as status	1–4	_____	_____	17–20	Very high
Money as security	5–8	_____	_____	13–16	High
Money as enjoyment	9–12	_____	_____	9–12	Moderate
Money as control	13–16	_____	_____	4–8	Low

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

Compare how you individually scored in each category. Discuss how you each value money.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT FINANCES & MONEY

LUKE 16:13 “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

PROVERBS 3:9-10 ⁹ Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. ¹⁰ Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine.

PROVERBS 13:11 Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows over time.

ECCLESIASTES 5:10 Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!

HEBREWS 13:5 Don’t love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.”

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10 ⁶ Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. ⁷ After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can’t take anything with us when we leave it. ⁸ So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. ⁹ But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19 ¹⁷ Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. ¹⁹ By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.

MATTHEW 6:19-21 ¹⁹ “Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.



FAMILY SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

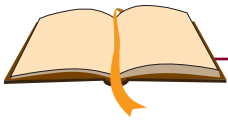
³⁰ *And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.* ³¹ *The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these.* — MARK 12:30-31

FAMILY SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

Spirituality and faith are powerful dimensions of the human experience. Sharing spiritual beliefs in a family can provide an important foundation for values and behaviors of individuals within the family. Studies have shown that families with strong spiritual beliefs are more resilient and are more connected to each other. Your family heritage can provide stability to your children as they grow. Talking and sharing your spiritual beliefs can help you improve your emotional health and wellbeing.

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

1. What is your family's religious tradition and heritage?
2. What holidays (holy days) and rituals does your family observe?
3. What holidays (holy days) and rituals do you find meaningful and why?
4. In what ways does your family's spiritual legacy affect your thinking?
5. How does your spiritual life affect your values and the decisions you make?
6. In what ways do you currently integrate your faith and spiritual life into your family?
7. Do you have strong feelings about the religious upbringing you are currently providing or plan to provide for your children?
8. Since spirituality has been shown to improve emotional health and well being in families, how can your family explore this potential for better living?
9. How much does the idea of 'loving your fellow human' matter within your family?
10. In what ways does your family talk about feeling connected to the world around you (other people, nature, the universe, etc.)?



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

PSALM 23:1 The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.

PSALM 27:1 The Lord is my light and my salvation so why should I be afraid? The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?

2 TIMOTHY 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

HEBREWS 13:5-6 ⁵ Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you." ⁶ So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?"

1 PETER 5:6-7 ⁶ So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. ⁷ Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

DEUTERONOMY 31:8 Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you."

MATTHEW 10:39 If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.

MARK 12:30-31 ³⁰ And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' ³¹ The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."



PERSONALITY

Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. — LUKE 6:37

SCOPE OUT YOUR PERSONALITY

Exploring your personality and your partner's personality, can be a fascinating and fun process. It can also point out challenges for couples who love one another, but have very different personalities and approaches to life.

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

First, review the Personality SCOPE section of your computer report.

1. In what area(s) are your personalities similar?

- a. How can your similarities be a strength?
- b. How can your similarities create problems?

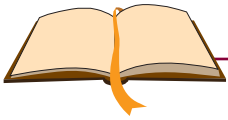
2. In what areas are your personalities different?

- a. How can your differences be a strength?
- b. How can your differences create problems?

3. Do the roles you fulfill in your relationship match your personality strengths?
(e.g. Does the person who scored high on organization manage the checkbook?)

Dealing with Personality Differences

- Don't try to change your partner's personality.
- Remember the positive aspects of your partner's personality that attracted you in the first place.
- Be responsible for yourself. Try to learn behaviors that will positively contribute to your relationship.
- How can you use your personality differences as a strength in your relationship?



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PERSONALITY ISSUES

2 PETER 1:5-6 ⁵ In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness.

PROVERBS 11:11-12 ¹¹ Upright citizens are good for a city and make it prosper, but the talk of the wicked tears it apart. ¹² It is foolish to belittle one's neighbor; a sensible person keeps quiet.

PROVERBS 11:13 A gossip goes around telling secrets, but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence.

PROVERBS 12:22 The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in those who tell the truth.

PROVERBS 25:19 Putting confidence in an unreliable person in times of trouble is like chewing with a broken tooth or walking on a lame foot.

PROVERBS 12:25 Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers a person up.

PROVERBS 17:22 A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength.

MATTHEW 6:34 "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."

LUKE 6:37 "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven."

ROMANS 14:12-13 ¹² Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. ¹³ So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.



PARENTING STRESS PROFILE

²⁸ Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

— MATTHEW 11:28-29

IDENTIFYING MOST CRITICAL ISSUES

Do you control stress in your life or does stress control you?

Stressors are events that cause an emotional and/or physical reaction. Stress can be positive (wedding, job promotion) or negative (loss of job, car accident, major illness). But what is important is to be able to manage the many stressors in your life.

One way to manage stress is to prioritize the issues that are most important to you. Another is to decide what issues can be changed or resolved and which ones cannot. This exercise will help you focus on the high priority issues and those that can be changed (Box 1).

Couple Exercise:

1. Select up to **four issues** that are the most stressful for each of you.
2. Review each issue and put it into one of the four cells below.
3. Box 1 contains the "Most Critical Issues."

	Able to Change	Difficult to Change
High Priority	Box 1: Most Critical Issues <i>What changes can you each make?</i>	Box 2 <i>How do you plan to cope?</i>
Low Priority	Box 3 <i>Are you spending too much time on low priority issues?</i>	Box 4: Least Critical Issues <i>Can you accept or forget about these issues?</i>

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

Select one issue from Box 1 that you will work on together as a couple/family. Work together as a team to achieve your goals.

1. Communicate about the issue.
2. Use good conflict resolution skills.
3. Be flexible with one another.



PARENTING STRESS PROFILE

My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

— PSALM 73:26

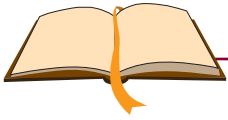
BALANCING YOUR PRIORITIES

First, indicate how much time you “Now” spend on each of these areas. Next, decide on the amount of time you would ideally spend—“Your Goal”. Then decide how you can achieve your goal.

	NOW (Hours per week)	YOUR GOAL	How will you move toward your goal?
WORK:			
Time on job/school	_____	_____	_____
Bringing work home	_____	_____	_____
Commuting	_____	_____	_____
PERSONAL:			
Exercise	_____	_____	_____
Television	_____	_____	_____
Computer/video games	_____	_____	_____
Hobby/Recreation	_____	_____	_____
Reading	_____	_____	_____
Friends	_____	_____	_____
Religious activities	_____	_____	_____
Volunteering	_____	_____	_____
Sleep (hours per night)	_____	_____	_____
MARRIAGE: (Couple)			
At home together	_____	_____	_____
Activities/Dates	_____	_____	_____
Discussions (minutes per day)	_____	_____	_____
HOME:			
Cleaning	_____	_____	_____
Cooking	_____	_____	_____
Grocery shopping	_____	_____	_____
Errands	_____	_____	_____
Lawn/Garden	_____	_____	_____
Home maintenance	_____	_____	_____
FAMILY:			
Number of meals together	_____	_____	_____
Family activities	_____	_____	_____
Transporting children	_____	_____	_____
Helping with homework	_____	_____	_____
At home together	_____	_____	_____

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

- What areas feel out of balance to each of you?
- What steps must you take in order for your goal to become reality?



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PARENTING STRESS

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 ⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

MATTHEW 6:28-30 ²⁸ "And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, ²⁹ yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ³⁰ And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

1 PETER 5:7 Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

LUKE 12:22-23 ²² Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing.

EXODUS 33:14 The Lord replied, "I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you."

HEBREWS 13:5 Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you."

JOSHUA 1:9 This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

MATTHEW 11:28-29 ²⁸ Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

PSALM 29:11 The Lord gives his people strength. The Lord blesses them with peace.

PSALM 73:26 My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

ROMANS 5:3-5 ³ We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴ And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵ And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.



CHILD BEHAVIORAL ISSUES

Focus on one child at a time and list three behavioral issues that you both feel are most problematic. If you both don't agree, select items where one of you feels the issue is problematic.

Child One: _____ (Name)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Child Two: _____ (Name)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Child Three: _____ (Name)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Child Four: _____ (Name)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

CIRCLE ONE ITEM ABOVE FOR EACH CHILD TO DEAL WITH.

Below, brainstorm ways you can deal with this problem differently than you have done in the past. Select one solution to use with each child.



PARENTING AND STEP-PARENTING

Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it. — PROVERBS 22:6

CREATING A WISH LIST FOR PARENTING:

- Each person should make a Wish List of three things they would like to have changed in regard to parenting.
- After completing the list, each person should take turns sharing their Wish List with each other. In sharing wishes they are being Assertive.
- After one person shares one Wish, then the other person repeats what they heard, demonstrating Active Listening.
- After sharing all 3 Wishes, each person should select one Wish they will try to implement.

Make a Wish List of 3 things that you would like to see changed regarding parenting:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Increasing your confidence in your parenting skills is understanding what is typical behavior for your child(ren), setting limits, spending enough time with your child(ren), learning to deal with your own frustrations and improving skills in dealing with upset children.

- What techniques do you use for dealing with your children's behavior? What works well and what doesn't?
- What behavior is typical for your children? What is not typical?
- If you need more time to be a good parent, what can you change to allow yourself that time?
- How do you get your children to listen to you?
- What frustrates you most about parenting? How do you deal with that frustration?
- How could you and your partner work better together as a parenting team?



STEP-PARENTING MYTHS

Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him. — PSALM 127:3

STEPFAMILIES: CHOOSING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Read through these common myths, noticing if any of them resonate with you and your partner. Use the questions in the Couple Discussion (below) to guide your discussion.

Myth: Because we love each other, the other family members will also love each other.

Reality: Love and/or good relationships may or may not happen between stepfamily members. It will likely take time for emotional bonds to develop; some will bond quickly, others slowly, and it is possible that some individuals may never bond.

Myth: We'll do marriage better this time around.

Reality: Those who have experienced a breakup or divorce often have learned tough lessons from the past. While a new marriage involves different people and different dynamics, it is not uncommon for individuals to slip into the same old patterns and routines (e.g., being avoidant during conflict). Be mindful not to repeat mistakes of the past.

Myth: Our children will feel as happy about this new family as we do.

Reality: The truth is children will at best be confused about the new marriage and at worst, they'll resent it. Remarriage is a gain for adults and a challenge for children. Only after much time, when family stability is obtained, does the remarriage also become a gain for children. Be patient with them.

Myth: The stepparent(s) will quickly bond with the children and act like another parent.

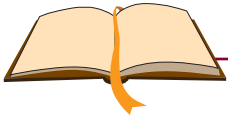
Reality: Sometimes stepparents want so badly to be accepted they try to manage the children as a parent would. They may also try to show affection like a biological parent would. Children often need some space initially to build a relationship with the stepparent. It is often a good idea to let the child set the pace and follow their lead.

Myth: We will be able to easily form a new family.

Reality: In most cases, children didn't ask for this new family, they need time to develop a history and sense of family. Don't push to create relationships. It is often better to have minimal expectations of how relationships will develop rather than grand expectations which may fail to materialize.

COUPLE DISCUSSION:

1. Which of these myths have you been tempted to believe?
2. How could having these unrealistic expectations set you up for frustration and disappointment?
3. How are you going to balance/prioritize the challenges of a stepfamily while also nourishing your couple relationship?



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PARENTING

PSALM 127:3 Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him.

PROVERBS 22:6 Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.

PROVERBS 13:24 Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them.

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7 ⁶ And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. ⁷ Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.

EPHESIANS 6:1-2 ¹ Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. ² “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise.

COLOSSIANS 3:21 Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.

EXODUS 20:12 “Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

LEVITICUS 19:32 “Stand up in the presence of the elderly, and show respect for the aged. Fear your God. I am the Lord.

MATTHEW 19:13-15 ¹³ One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. ¹⁴ But Jesus said, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.” ¹⁵ And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.



FIVE PARENTING STYLES DEFINED

BALANCED STYLE: Sometimes referred to in literature as “democratic” or “autocratic”. This style tends to be most healthy because there is a balance of age-appropriate child autonomy and parental control. Independence is encouraged and discipline is consistent and fair. Parenting is warm and nurturing without being overindulgent. Discipline tends to be consistent and fair. According to research, this parenting style is related to the best outcomes for children and teens.

PERMISSIVE STYLE: This parenting style allows the child/teen a lot of freedom and choice. Parents may have a hard time saying “No” to their child/teen, establishing and enforcing rules, and creating boundaries. Also called “indulgent” parenting, this style is characterized by high responsiveness to a child’s needs and high emotional connection. When extreme and sustained, permissive parenting is related to difficulties for children and teens in taking personal responsibility and learning how to delay gratification.

OVERBEARING STYLE: Often referred to in literature as “authoritarian”. This style is typically demanding with high levels of control and high levels of responsiveness and closeness. An “overbearing” parent is highly connected to their child/teen and also has high expectations for them to conform and comply with their rules, guidance, and direction. When extreme and sustained, this parenting style is related to anxiousness and lower self-esteem for children and teens.

STRICT STYLE: This parenting style is characterized by predictability and order, and rules that allow little room for negotiation. Discipline tends to be firm. Unlike the “overbearing” style, however, emotional connection is low. When extreme and sustained, research suggests that this parenting style is related to teens feeling uncared for and a higher risk of substance abuse.

UNINVOLVED STYLE: This parenting style allows the child/teen a lot of freedom and choice and few (or poorly-enforced) rules and boundaries, but lacks the emotional responsiveness characterized by the “permissive” style. This style is characterized by low emotional connection with few demands placed on the child. When extreme and sustained, children parented in this style may feel isolated and are at an increased risk for substance abuse and for performing poorly in school.



FIVE PARENTING STYLES

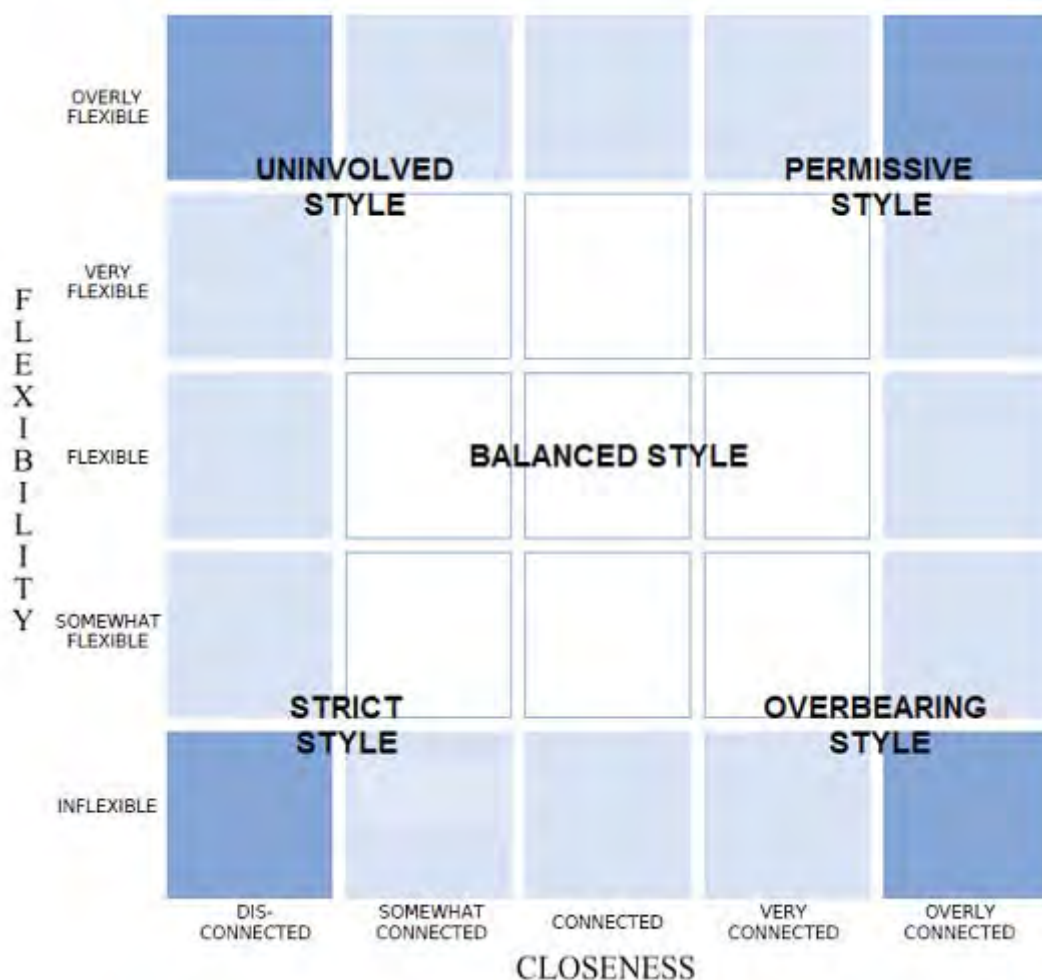
Balanced Style.....Healthy level of parenting, Closeness and Flexibility

Permissive Style.....Very Connected and Very Flexible parenting

Overbearing Style.....Very Connected and Inflexible parenting

Strict StyleDisconnected and Inflexible parenting

Uninvolved Style.....Disconnected and Very Flexible parenting



COUPLE DISCUSSION:

- Discuss how parenting styles for each person are similar or different on Closeness and Flexibility.
- Discuss how well their Parenting Style works for each of them.
- Evaluate and discuss how they might want to adjust or change their Parenting Style in terms of Closeness and Flexibility.



CREATING A BALANCED PARENTING STYLE

A balanced style of parenting tends to be the most healthy because it balances age-appropriate child autonomy and parental control. Independence is encouraged and discipline is consistent and fair. Parenting is warm and nurturing without being overindulgent. According to research, a balanced parenting style is related to the best outcomes for children and teens.

Balanced parenting is achieved by balancing closeness and flexibility. Below are ideas for increasing closeness or decreasing closeness.

INCREASING PARENTING CLOSENESS

Suggestions for Increasing Parent/Child Closeness include:

- Set aside quality time to be available and present with your child.
- Share a special activity, such as Friday night movie night, breakfast on the weekend.
- Help children with homework.
- Prepare and/or eat meals together.
- Have “dates” with each of your children/teens.
- Say no to outside activities that take too much time and energy from your family.
- Volunteer as a family in your community.
- Create family photo albums together or review existing photos.
- Tell your child/children why you are grateful having them in your life.

DECREASING PARENTING CLOSENESS

Suggestions for Increasing Child Autonomy and Reducing Parent/Child Closeness include:

- Allow children to have different opinions and interests; value their individuality.
- Respect one another’s space.
- Create an area in the home where there is room for only one.
- Encourage family members to spend time with friends and/or activities outside of the home.
- Could “over-nurturing” be harming your child/teen?



CREATING A BALANCED PARENTING STYLE

Balanced parenting style is achieved by balancing closeness and flexibility. Below are ideas for increasing or decreasing flexibility.

INCREASING PARENTING FLEXIBILITY

Suggestions for Increasing Parent/Child Flexibility include:

- Try sharing leadership and roles to break-up normal routine.
- Exchange household chores for a week.
- Set limits for teens, but allow room for them to grow and think for themselves.
- Allow children to negotiate and be part of the decision-making as age appropriate (e.g.: allow a young child to pick out an outfit, a pre-teen to select a restaurant for a family outing.)
- Consider your child/teen's perspective.

DECREASING PARENTING FLEXIBILITY

Suggestions for Decreasing Flexibility and adding structure include:

- Add ritual and routine to family life.
- Set limits and standards for children/teens and enforce them.
- Assign chores to children/teens that are age appropriate.



FAMILY MEETINGS

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. — Romans 8:28

A family meeting is a time for all family members to get together and to share and re-connect with each other. Spending time together helps family members feel supported and it can become an important family ritual.

Guidelines:

1. All family members participate who are old enough.
2. Establish a regular time and place when the entire family is together, such as after a family meal.
3. Encourage discussion by everyone. Do not criticize and critique.
4. Practice assertiveness and active listening—and praise each other for sharing.

FAMILY DISCUSSION:

1. Sharing a Family Strength—one thing each person likes about the family.
2. Sharing a Family Growth Area—one thing each person would like to see changed.
3. Choose one issue to work on that week.
4. Brainstorm possible ideas to resolve the issue.
5. Discuss ideas and select one idea to try out.
6. Plan to discuss progress at the meeting next week.

ALTERNATIVE FAMILY DISCUSSION:

1. What do you feel was the best thing that happened to you or your family this week/or recently?
2. What was the worst thing that happened to you or your family this week?
3. For an issue discussed in the previous question, what could have been done differently?
4. Have each person share what is a strength of your family.