



# TOGETHER

*A practical guide to discovering the real  
purpose of marriage*

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# Prologue

Being together...

That is what marriage is all about. In this book, you will discover some guidelines that will help you to continue to grow closer to each other as time goes by. Therefore, the earlier in your marriage you can read and incorporate some of the ideas in this book into your relationship, the better. However, even if you have been married for a long time, you can always grow closer together.

To help you in this endeavour, this book is divided into ten short sections, in which some of the most common issues of married life is discussed. Although there is a set design in the sequence of the different sections, you are welcome to jump around between sections, or dip in and out as needed. However, at the end of each section, you will find an action. It is strongly recommended that you complete each action after you've read the particular section, as it will help you to incorporate some of the key ideas into your relationship.

May the insights in these pages stimulate your thinking about marriage, enrich your conversations with each other, and above all, help you to grow closer together.

# 1. The Purpose Of Marriage

If you want to be successful at anything in life, you first need to establish what you are trying to achieve. In other words, you need to know what your purpose is with any specific task. The same is true of marriage; the chances of a happy or successful marriage will be much higher if you know what your purpose is. Therefore, what is the purpose of marriage? Is it to find a soulmate, have fun or start a family?


Marriage is intended for all these reasons, but it is also so much more. In fact, one of the main purposes of marriage, if not the main goal, is intimacy. When people hear this word, the first thing that usually comes to mind, is sex. Although sexuality is part of intimacy, it is so much more. Intimacy is acceptance without the fear of rejection.

Intimacy means that you have a closeness, a 'togetherness' in your relationship; an atmosphere of warmth and safety and a space where you can just be yourself, because you are accepted for who you are. Therefore, intimacy is not only a physical state. It also has an emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimension. Intimacy is when two people are really 'together' and connect emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and physically.

The higher the level of intimacy in your marriage, the healthier, happier or more successful your marriage will be. The less intimacy you have, the harder it will be to have a healthy or successful marriage

Therefore, one of the most important questions you need to ask yourself regularly, is: are we currently growing closer to each other or further apart?





*A successful marriage  
requires falling in love  
many times,  
always with the  
same person*

- Mignon McLaughlin



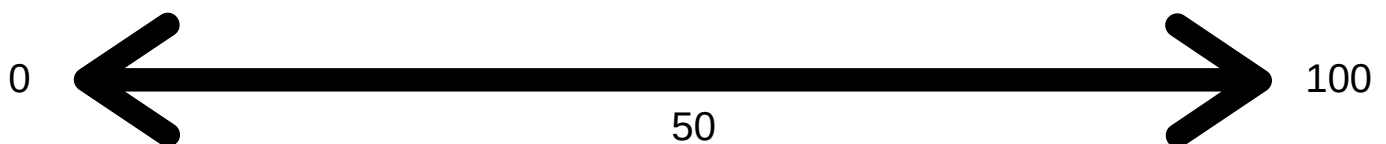
# Action

To help you determine where you are right now in terms of the intimacy in your marriage, please complete the following exercise:

a. Tick the box which describes where you are currently in each of these categories in your marriage.

	Intimate	Close	Neutral	Apart	Distant
Physical					
Emotional					
Intellectual					
Spiritual					

b. Mark your relationship, in general, on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is having no hope for the future and you are at the point of giving up and 100 is where you have never been so happy in your relationship before.



When you look at the results of this exercise, would you say that you are currently growing closer to each other or are you drifting apart? Either way, things can always get better.

Identifying that intimacy is lacking is a step in the right direction. Guidance from this book and a commitment to each other, will help you develop a more intimate relationship, in which you are truly together and growing closer to each other. In the next section, we will be discussing how to build greater intimacy into your marriage..



## 2. Love is...

After a few years (or months) of marriage, couples will sometimes experience a slight change in their relationship; life together (or their level of intimacy) is no longer as exciting as it was before the wedding. Usually, this is attributed to the difference between 'love' and being 'in love', with the former being regarded as the more boring of the two.

Being 'in love' is seen as a chemical reaction that lasts around two years on average. During this time, your focus will be totally on the other person and life is usually amazing during this 'dating' period. This is the time when you cannot get enough of the other person, you spend hours talking to each other, listening to the other person's deepest needs, desires and dreams. You do fun things together, walk hand-in-hand and watch movies together. The grass is greener and the sky is bluer and you are totally focussed on the well-being of the other person and constantly ask, or think:

"What can I do for you?" If your partner tells you they forgot their lunch at home, you will not think twice about surprising them with an office-picnic, or going out of your way to make sure they have something to eat. Nothing is too much trouble; it is all about the other person.

When this changes, people (wrongly) assume that it is because the 'being in love' period has expired. In actual fact, it is because the focus changes from the other person to yourself. Suddenly it is no longer about them and their needs, but about you and your needs. It slowly changes from "how can I help you" to "you should have helped me with this, and you didn't." From "I cannot spend enough time listening to you" to "you never listen to me", from "I want to help take care of you" to "you can take care of yourself" and when your partner forgets their lunch, you are very quick to point out that you put it out, together with their keys, and cannot understand how they missed it!



Thus, this change does not occur because a couple transitioned from being 'in love' to 'love', as though 'love' is inferior. This change occurred because they did not learn what being 'in love' should have taught them. The lesson we should all learn while being 'in love' is what unselfish love should really look like. This is the time that we should experience what it means to put the other one's interests above our own. If we continue putting them first, the love we experience in marriage will be a much deeper and rewarding experience than being 'in love' ever was.

Being 'in love' can be compared with the little stabilising wheels that helps a toddler learn to ride a bicycle. They use it to feel what it is like to ride successfully and thus learn to keep their balance. In the same way, during the 'in love' period, we should learn what it feels like to be unselfish in our love towards one another and thus practise that love is about you and not about me.

Therefore, the purpose of being 'in love' is not to just give you an amazing warm feeling. It is to teach you what unselfish love (showing real intimacy) is. This will enable you to continue to focus on the other person and put their interests above yours, even when the chemicals have burnt away.



*"Love itself is what is  
left over when being in  
love has burned  
away..."*

- Louis de Bernières



# Action

Be honest with yourself: has there been a gradual drift from ‘focussing on your partner’s well-being’, to ‘putting yourself first’?

If so, begin to turn it around again to the way it was; regularly ask your partner: “What can I do for you?”

The next section is going to help you understand both you and your partner’s needs better.



### 3. Well what do you expect?!

One of the biggest causes of frustration in any marriage, is when one, or both, feel that the other person is not fulfilling their needs or meeting their expectations.

If you want to successfully deal with this common marital issue, you first need to understand that we all have legitimate needs. The reason we often feel frustrated is not due to the needs per se, but because we do not always communicate our needs clearly to the other person. We often disguise them as vague statements and we hope the other one will pick up on them or 'read between the lines'. Most of the time, though, they are quite oblivious to our hidden meaning; leaving us extremely frustrated. This frustration can be reduced significantly, if we learn to communicate our legitimate needs gently, but clearly, instead of throwing out hints in the hope that your partner will pick it up.

However, legitimate needs can sometimes change into expectations – and that is where the real problems start!

Everyone enters marriage with a lot of dreams and desires; ideas about the way we would like things to be. You imagine, for instance, that one day you'll live in a nice big house and that you'll come home and that everything will be neat and tidy; just like the house in which you were raised. You dream about how you would spend your time together and you talk about a lot of these things before you get married.

But then, somewhere after the honeymoon, probably close to where being 'in love' is exchanged for 'love', there usually comes a point where (often legitimate) desires become expectations. Before you got married, you only dreamt about doing things a certain way; now that you are married, you expect that it should be that way, usually your way.

This will change the dynamics of your relationship radically, because it is no longer about what is best for the other person, but about what you want. It changes from: "I would really like it if you did this or that" to "she is supposed

to keep the house clean, but when I get home, there are toys everywhere and the whole kitchen is full of dirty dishes” or “he is supposed to do the DIY, but there is always something that is broken”.

It goes from: “how can I help you?” to “you’re not fulfilling my needs anymore.” Then comes the automatic next step of: “He’s not doing his part anymore, so I am not going to do mine.” It has now become all about you – and usually, if people continue with this thinking pattern, it will not be long, before they say: “He or she just doesn’t make me happy anymore.” And this is the fallacy that is underlying to this whole issue: that our partner is supposed to make us happy by fulfilling our expectations.

Ultimately, though, no-one could make someone else happy. If you constantly look to someone else to make you happy, you are setting yourself up for disappointment, and you are being unfair towards them. In addition, you’ve got to remember that you didn’t marry your partner so that they could fulfil your needs, you married them so that you could fulfil theirs... Or that is at least what you said; we call the promises you make at your wedding, vows and not contracts. A wedding vow is a promise you make to love and to cherish the other person. This vow is not dependent on whether the other person also make a vow or not, otherwise it would be called a wedding promise or contract. The nature of a vow is that you commit yourself to something or someone – and in the case of a wedding vow, it means that you will put your partner’s interests above your own; love them unconditionally.

One of the biggest problems with expectations is the fact that it is the opposite of unconditional love, the environment in which intimacy will flourish, because you are putting conditions on your love. Therefore, even if your partner did exactly what you expected of them, they would only fulfil their part of the deal. They would only do what is expected of them; there is nothing amazing or “wow” or unconditional about that. If they don’t do it, then they’re in trouble, which means it is totally conditional.





*"Love is always  
bestowed as a gift -  
freely, willingly, and  
without expectation. We  
don't love to be loved,  
we love to love."*

- Leo Buscaglia

In other words, by expecting something you desire from your partner, you are taking love out of the equation and replacing it with a contract. Nothing more than you would have with a landlord or a mortgage company.

However, when you remain true to your vows; when you keep serving your partner and asking how you could help him or her, regardless of whether they keep their promises, you are going to increase the chances of intimacy in your marriage significantly.



# Action

Tell your partner about a desire or need that you have on a regular basis, which you may not have communicated clearly to them. Do not accuse them of “not meeting your needs”; just share honestly and clearly one thing that would make a big difference for you personally, if that was done. In other words: tell your partner your biggest current need.

## 4. Show some commitment

In any marriage counselling session, my first question is always: “Do you want to make your relationship work?” If they answer: “Yes”, then there is hope, because the moment you want to achieve anything, you are showing commitment. And when you commit to anything, your attitude towards it will change and when your attitude changes, your actions will inevitably also change. Thus, the key to an improved marriage, is to want to improve it.

However, if you wonder whether you still want to be in a relationship or not, you significantly diminish the chances of it surviving. Marriage requires total commitment towards your partner and your relationship with them.

In the end, love is a choice, it is an attitude you choose to cultivate. You are the one who decides whether you are going to keep your vows or not. Therefore, if you want to increase the intimacy level in your marriage, you have to commit to put your love into action; to do something practically to show that you love your partner. The language of love should involve questions such as: “how can I help you?” or “what do you need?” It does not place demands such as: “you must fulfil my needs.”



*"Marriage is a  
commitment- a decision  
to do, all through  
life, that which will  
express your love for  
one's spouse."*

- Herman H. Kieval



# Action

Spend some time with your partner and ask them these three questions:

- a) How can I help you?
- b) How can I make your life easier?
- c) How can I be a better husband/wife to you?

If you want to continue to grow in intimacy, ask these questions regularly, write down what your partner said and then commit to doing it. This will have a radically positive impact on your relationship.

The next section ties in to this by focusing on communication.

## 5. Communication, communication, communication

Poor communication is commonly regarded as one of the main reasons for divorce in our day and age. Often though, it is not the lack of communication, but rather that the communication couples do have, is negative in nature; full of criticism or contempt.

Therefore, if you want to improve your marriage significantly, focus on improving your communication. The first step is to make time to communicate with each other. Make sure that you have a “sit-down-and-talk” time as part of your daily routine.

Research has shown that people need at least 10 minutes per day to talk about their day and to de-stress; that is the bare minimum. However, if you want to grow closer to each other, ensure that you spend time talking to each other at least an hour per day. Of course, this could be spread throughout the day, but it is vital that you have regular, positive communication with each other.





*"Communication to a  
relationship is like  
oxygen to life.  
Without it... it dies."*

- Tony Gaskins



# Action

Communication basically has two elements: listening and speaking.

Before reading some general tips on how to improve your communication, evaluate yourself on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is excellent and 0 is very poor. Only evaluate yourself, not your partner.

## Basic communication techniques

Listening											
1. Do you focus your full attention on your partner when they speak? Are you attentive?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. Do you show empathy?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. Are you encouraging?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. Do you clarify to ensure that you understood them correctly?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Speaking											
5. Are you considerate? Would you talk to a client/ good friend in the same way?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. Are you courteous and kind to them?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. Are you open with your partner, disclosing what you feel?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. Do you formulate what you want to say clearly, leaving little room for misunderstandings?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. Do you make requests rather than demands?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. Do you have a good grasp of timing when you want to convey something?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

After you have completed this exercise, share your scores with your partner. Where did you score particularly low? How can you improve it? Does your partner have any suggestions?

**Here are seven guidelines that can improve communication:**

1. Check the motive of your communication. If your motive is aggression and you are out to hurt your partner, then they will oppose you. However, if your motive is love; to show that you value and care about them, it will lead to greater intimacy.
2. Provide information about the background surrounding what you are saying. Do not work it all out in your head and then just share your conclusion with your partner.
3. Be honest about your feelings and make sure that you distinguish between the facts and your feelings about the facts. You may feel frustrated in your relationship and then you say: “our relationship is a disaster.” Meanwhile, the facts are that you both work during the day, you do not go to bed at the same time and you are both extremely tired. If you changed some of the facts, your feelings would probably change as well.
4. When you have a difference of opinion, share your thinking and your feelings, without breaking down your partner’s character. Do not make it personal. Communicate clearly that you care for them, despite the difference of opinion you may have with them. For instance, instead of saying to your partner: “You are just so messy!”, say: “I love you – and I know you like to see all the spices when you cook. However, when you are finished, I would really appreciate it if you could put them in the cupboard again.”
5. In conflict, tackle the problem, not each other. Be especially careful not to bring other people into the argument. For instance, it is better to say: “It is really important to me that we are on time for our appointments”, rather than saying: “You are always late! Just like the rest of your family...”
6. Learn to say: “I am sorry” and “I forgive you.” If you realise you were wrong, apologise. If your partner asks forgiveness, extend it. Your relationship is more important than your ego.
7. Move from problems to solutions that will work for both of you. In other words, compromise. Suggest alternative options and write them down.

Therefore, if you want to improve your communication, always focus on building your partner, instead of breaking them down.

However, just as important as how you communicate, is when you communicate.

Many of the biggest communication difficulties occur when we are tired or stressed. During these times, something small will often trigger a whole avalanche of emotion. Where possible, avoid anything that may cause a new argument late at night or when you are pressed for time, as it will be difficult to resolve these issues, purely due to the timing of the communication. If you had the same discussion at a more suitable time, your reactions would probably be vastly different. Therefore, make sure you keep 'timing' in mind, especially when you want to communicate something important.

In this section, we discussed how to improve our communication in general. In the next section, we will look at a specific communication issue that can cause a lot of problems for any couple: defensiveness.

## 6. Defend yourself (or maybe not)

Defensiveness in one (or both) parties, can cause serious havoc in any marriage. This usually happens when one feels that the image they have of themselves is being threatened by the other person.

For instance, you're washing up and your partner comes in and says something apparently innocent, like: "It is much better to wash the cutlery first; and I would first clear the table before I put water in the sink." Almost immediately you lose it and fire back with: "If you can do it better, then do it yourself!" With that, you throw the sponge into the sink and storm out of the kitchen, leaving your partner totally confused about what just happened.

The truth is that you may not know exactly what happened either, and unless you make time to think about it and then discuss it with your partner, it may just cause some further tension between the two of you.

There could be various reasons that you exploded. It may be that you think of yourself as someone who is generally quite competent and your partner's comment made you feel incompetent or you may have felt that you are being criticised, despite your good intentions of actually washing the dishes. Whatever the specific reason may be, reactions like this are usually triggered because you (or the image you have of yourself) or your motives are being threatened. This results in a reflexive reaction, not backed by thought. At that moment, you do not stop to consider your partner's possible intention, you just lash out.

There are many variations of this argument, but the point is that whenever someone perceives their identity to be under threat, or when they think someone else is questioning their motives or accusing or criticising them, they will usually become very defensive. This can create a lot of distance between two people.

When an episode like this occurs, make some time to reflect and try to establish the reasons why you reacted so defensively.



Once you know, and you have calmed down, speak to your partner about it. Apologise for your behaviour and then explain why you acted the way you did. This will help you both to deal better with similar situations in the future.

In any argument, focus on discussing the issue without making it personal. One of the best ways to do this, is by using language that is appropriate and in the first person, without making assumptions about the other person's identity or motives. These are known as I-messages, such as "I experienced this", "I felt lonely" or "I felt sad."

The moment you start with the second person, saying for example: "you did this", "you made me feel..." or "You said that", your partner will feel threatened and he or she will try to defend themselves, thus causing the rift to deepen between you. However, when you say how you feel, you are making yourself vulnerable. Consequently, your partner will not feel threatened, which will usually lead to a more amicable response. In this way, resolving the issue will be quicker.

Research has shown that when the atmosphere in a relationship is generally positive, fewer comments are deemed as personal attacks. On the other hand, a negative atmosphere will lead to more remarks being perceived as personal attacks. When you believe that the other person does not have your best interests at heart, then you will see more malice in almost everything they say and do. This brings us back to remembering that the purpose of marriage is experiencing intimacy. Therefore, your aim should be to create an environment and communicate in such a way, that your partner feels safe and accepted for who they are.

Make a conscious effort to look for positive behaviour and characteristics in your partner, instead of always looking for things to criticise. This change of emphasis will result in your defensiveness diminishing significantly and will lead to a generally more positive atmosphere in your relationship.



*"Ultimately the bond  
of all companionships,  
whether in marriage or  
in friendships, is  
conversation."*

- Oscar Wilde

# Action

Think of one thing your partner does regularly, which you regard as very positive. Share this with them.

## 7. Reducing misunderstandings

Misunderstandings occur in any marriage relationship and can often lead to a lot of unnecessary emotional pain. Therefore, it is vital that we should not only work at improving our communication in general, but also at reducing our misunderstandings. One of the best ways to achieve this, is to understand that there are usually two intrinsically linked sides to any misunderstanding in marriage: intention and interpretation.

Generally, someone has a specific intention when they do or say anything. However, that intention does not always come across in the communication. For instance, when you communicate with your partner, they may perceive your message in such a way that they are hurt by what you said or they will become very defensive, while that was not your intention at all. However, whether you meant it or not, if your partner is hurt during the communication process, their experience is always valid and it will tell you whether you have communicated your intention effectively or not. Therefore, no matter what you (as the communicator) meant, if your partner (as the receiver of the communication) does not get that message, there will be a misunderstanding. Thus, you, as the communicator, always need to check to make sure that your intention came across as you wanted it to.

On the other side of the ‘misunderstanding-equation’, we find interpretation. This refers to how the listener or receiver of the communication interprets what the communicator said. For instance, if your partner communicated something to you, it is up to you (as the receiver of the communication) to check whether your interpretation of that communication is indeed how it was intended. This can be done, by simply reflecting back to your partner what you understood they said. They then have an opportunity to confirm or clarify that message.

However, sometimes, people’s behaviour seems to contradict what they said. During those times, it is important to give your partner the benefit of the doubt until you can check your interpretation of events.



For example, your partner said they would take out the rubbish, but when you get home, it is still in the house. You could now easily draw the conclusion that your partner does not really care and that is why they left the rubbish in the kitchen.

However, if you allow for the fact that you may have interpreted either their message or their behaviour wrongly and that there could be another valid reason, your reaction will also be different. Therefore, if you cannot immediately check your interpretation of any communication (whether in word or deed), wait with your judgement, until you can. In other words: believe the best about your partner, until proven otherwise.

Therefore, in any misunderstanding, there are always two sides to the story. You both have a responsibility to check and make sure that the intention came across and that it is interpreted correctly. If you take a little time to bring this discipline into your communication, it will reduce misunderstandings in your marriage radically.

*"A good marriage is  
the union of two good  
forgivers."*

- Ruth Bell Graham



# Action

Practise checking to see whether your intention came across whenever you are the communicator. Use sentences like: “just to make sure you understood me correctly...” or “what I mean is this...”

Practise improving your interpretation by clarifying the communicator’s intention, when you are the receiver of the communication. Use sentences like: “just to clarify...” or “I just want to make sure I understood you correctly...”



## 8. Time to connect

When one person looks at their partner's behaviour and deduce that they are not as high a priority as their partner's work, hobbies or extended family, it can cause a lot of pain.

Whether that is the partner's intention or not, remember that the receiver's feelings are always valid. Thus, either the intention wasn't communicated clearly or it is interpreted wrongly. Whatever the reason may be, this issue will need to be resolved, otherwise it will cause or increase the negative atmosphere in the relationship.

The bottom-line is that if your partner feels that he or she is not one of the highest priorities in your life, then it will adversely affect the intimacy in your marriage, which may eventually create a big gap between the two of you.

Therefore, if you want to really connect with your partner, decide that you will do everything you can to communicate to them that, of everything on this earth, they are most important to you. In other words, if you don't want them to feel that your work or hobbies or anything else is more important than they are, you need to honour them.

To honour means that you really admire and respect them. It is the same attitude you would have if you handled an object that was extremely precious. For instance, if you had the opportunity to handle a piece of art that was hundreds of years old and extremely valuable, you would do so with the greatest care, admiration and respect, because you knew it was irreplaceable.

That is how you need to treat your partner: with honour and respect, because they are extremely valuable and there is no-one else like them. If you make sure that you regularly honour and admire your partner, it will have an incredibly positive impact on your relationship.



*"Happily ever after is not a fairy tale. It's a choice."*

- Fawn Weaver



# Action

To help you experience that admiration and honour for your partner, do the following exercise with them. It will work best, if you record the questions below beforehand, so that you can fully experience it with your partner when you play it back. Remember to allow enough time on your recording after each step or question, so that you can take the suggested action.

1. What is really amazing about your partner? Do not tell them, just write it down.

2. For the following questions, do not say anything out loud or write anything down. This is a meditative exercise, so purely think of or imagine your answers to these questions:

a) Close your eyes and think back to the first time you saw your partner or how you met them. What can you remember? What stood out? How did you feel?

b) Think back to your dating days. Why did you fall in love with them? What attracted you to them in the first place? Think of all the excitement and fun you had. Think of all the special times and everything you did together.

c) Think of a specific special time you shared. In your mind's eye, see what you saw, hear what you heard, feel what you felt. Re-experience it. Now, make the colours a little brighter in your mind. Make the sounds a little louder and make the feeling in your heart double so strong. Really feel it.

d) Open your eyes and look into your partner's eyes for a few moments. He or she is still the same person.

e) Share with your partner what you thought about and what attracted you to them in the first place.

f) Take out your list you wrote in the beginning and tell them why they are so amazing to you.

## 9. We are a team

Sometimes married couples feel that they have so many differences that they are just not “compatible”. However, the reality is that both successful and unsuccessful couples have a lot of differences. In fact, opposites often attract initially. Someone who is a bit shy may, for instance, be attracted to confident and talkative people. Later, though, it may be this initial attraction that irritates them the most. It is not the differences that make people ‘incompatible’, it is how they think about their differences.

If you think of your partner as almost a ‘rival’ because they are so different to you, it will increase distance between you. However, if you think of your partner as your teammate and of your marriage relationship as your team, then it will change the dynamics totally.

No matter what type of team you talk about, everyone in the team does not need to be exactly the same. In fact, the greater the variety within a team, the better the team often is. If you think of your differences as something that will drive you apart, it probably will. However, if you think of your differences as a way of complementing each other and becoming a more complete team, it will increase intimacy between you. Together, you will be able to accomplish so much more, but the key is to think of yourself as a team.

*"A great marriage is not when the 'perfect couple' comes together. It is when an imperfect couple learns to enjoy their differences."*

- Dave Meurer



# Action

- a) Think about your own behaviour. What do you do that is not ideal for your team (your marriage)? Write it down.
- b) What do you have to change to give your team a better chance at success?
- c) Discuss your answers with your partner.

Sometimes it is hard to look beyond your differences. When this is the case, these guidelines may help:

1. Identify your differences and which of those are a problem to you. Write it down.
2. What specifically about those differences is bothering you? The more specific you are, the easier it will be to work towards a solution.
3. Ask yourself: “Why is it bothering me so much? What is it about my own story or my own beliefs that make me so irritated with their behaviour?”  
When you understand your own feelings better, it will be easier to communicate it to your partner, which will increase the levels of intimacy in your relationship.
4. The moment you know why something irritates you, you are ready to discuss it with your partner. Remember to speak in the first person (I-messages) when you communicate why you think their behaviour is bothering you. Problems that started because of differences between two people can be resolved. Unfortunately, though, many couples use a lot of their energy to try and change the other person – and that almost never works. However, if we accept the differences, we can stop judging each other and rather focus on addressing the issues that came because of your differences. Both will feel that they can be themselves and are accepted for who they are. Maybe it is time to just sit down and start with: “You know, I realise you are an extravert and enjoy parties, while I’m an introvert and prefer a quiet evening at home; neither one is better than the other...” That is a great beginning to using your differences to complement, rather than make life difficult, for each other.

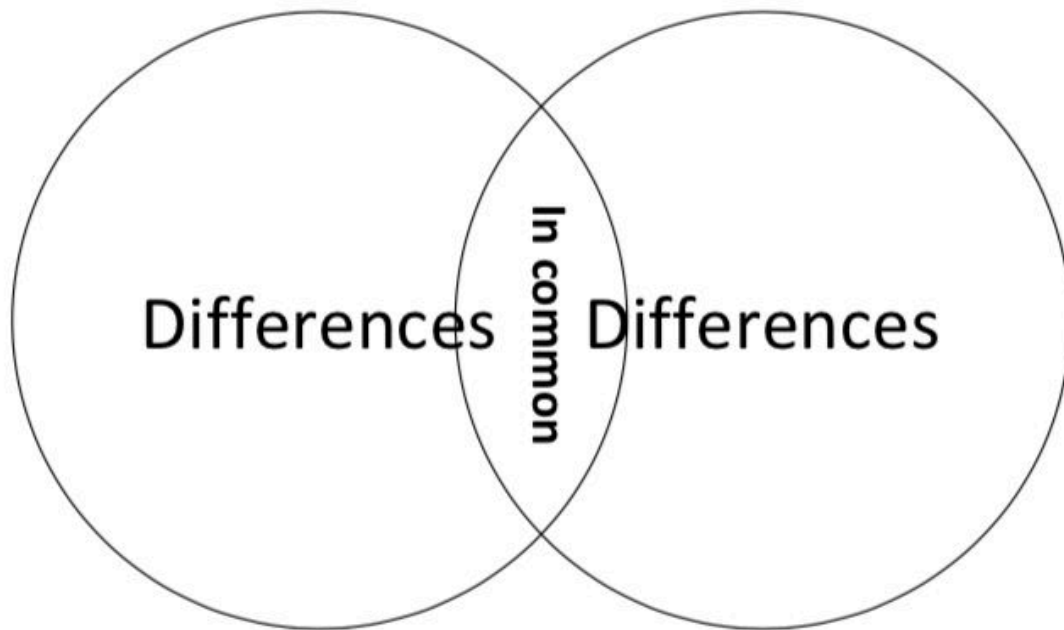


5. How can you help to make life easier for your partner? Be specific and be willing to make certain adjustments. You do not have to change your basic orientation or preferences; you just make a voluntary change to your behaviour to accommodate your partner and make life a bit easier for them. Aim to use your differences to complement each other and to use your individual gifts and personality to benefit the team.

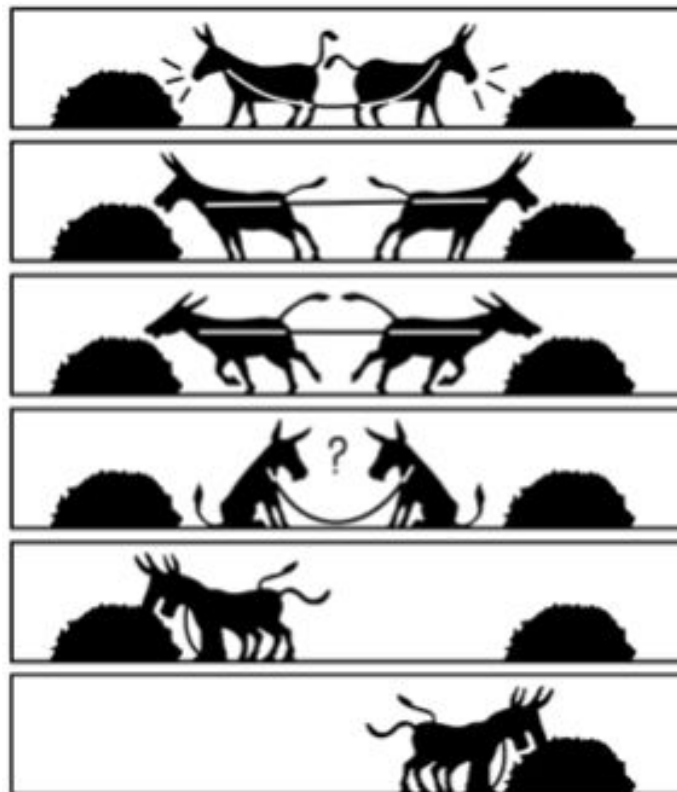
Therefore, in summary, change your thinking from: “We are just so different...” to “We are a team.” It is going to make a world of difference.

# 10. Together

In any marriage relationship, when two people come together, there are certain things that they will have in common, and certain things that couldn't be further apart if they tried.



By focussing on your differences, you are pulling in two different directions and are actually pulling your team apart, like the two donkeys in the cartoon.



Rather, focus on those things that is the best for your team and will thus bring you closer to each other. You are still going to have your own unique personality and there will still be things you do for yourself as an individual. But your first question should always be whether something you want to do is in the best interest of your team, or not. If it's not, then it is not an option.

Marriage is a 'team sport' and that is the way you need to think about it if you want to win at it. When your thinking is: "it is them or me", then it will always be a win-lose situation and usually it is both of you who will lose. However, if it is "you and me together", it is a lot more fun, because you can do so much more together, than on your own.

One of the best ways to enhance this 'team-feeling' is to focus on doing some activities together. When you were dating, you did a lot of activities together, and the more you did, the closer you became. As time went by, you probably focussed more on your own interests and activities again.

Therefore, if you want to really invest in your relationship, start doing activities together again. It is one of the best emotional investments you can make in life and it will pay great dividends.

*"Many marriages  
would be better if the  
husband and the wife  
clearly  
understood that they  
are on the same side."*

- Zig Ziglar



# Action

- a) Write down your top 3 activities, those things you enjoy doing the most.
- b) Ask your partner to do the same.
- c) Share these with each other and see if there is any way in which you can combine them. For instance, if your top activity is to cycle, while your partner's top activity is to get away as far as possible from other people and spend some time in nature, maybe you can combine it by going away for a weekend and taking your mountain bikes with you. Be creative.
- d) Decide what you are going to do together and set a date right now.



A romantic wedding scene at night. A couple is seen from behind, walking away from the camera. The man is wearing a dark suit, and the woman is wearing a white wedding dress. They are holding sparklers, and the background is filled with other guests and more sparklers, creating a warm and celebratory atmosphere. The text "Enjoy life together!" is overlaid in a black, cursive font.

*Enjoy life  
together!*

# About the Author

Dr Jaco Beukes is an experienced counsellor, life coach, and pastor. His passion is helping people through life's challenges and inspiring personal growth. A large focus of his role includes working with couples to build healthy relationships. He has developed several self-coaching models which aim to empower people to reach greater levels of success. Jaco regularly presents on topics such as relationships, leadership and personal development.



He is co-founder of the Charity, Loving by Giving, which aims to relieve poverty. He has run projects in the UK, Romania and East Africa, to address need in these communities. He lives in Cambridge, in the UK, with his wife and two daughters and enjoys being involved in a range of outdoor activities.

## Counselling Sessions

Dr. Beukes offers counselling covering a wide variety of issues, including marriage- and couples counselling.

You can email him at [jaco@lovingbygiving.com](mailto:jaco@lovingbygiving.com) for any one on one counselling needs big or small.