

KEEPING OUR RELATIONSHIP A PRIORITY -- 17.5 Min.**OBJECTIVE:**

To assure the participants that it is possible to make our dreams come true if we keep our relationship a priority; to assure them that living passionately will benefit themselves, the church and the world.

GENERAL FORMAT:

To know: that there are five tools to keep their relationship a priority; how to use those tools when they go home; what it means for a couple to be **holy** as a sign of Christ's love; the value of re-evaluation and change for the sake of their relationship.

To do: decide to use the tools to keep their relationship a priority.

To experience: a sense of hope that they can live differently.

WHERE ARE THE COUPLES?

They have just written an incredible love letter and have spent 75 minutes in passionate attention to each other. They are upbeat and excited about their relationship. Your task is to keep them up and convince them that they can continue this newfound excitement in their relationship when they get home.

I. Introduction *(LH: 0.5 min.)*

“This talk is ‘Keeping Our Relationship a Priority.’ The key concept is that there are five tools to keep our relationship a priority. We’re on page 52 in the workbook. In the last talk we looked at our marriage as a covenant and the blessings we have available to us as married couples. In this talk we are going to learn how to keep our covenant-love relationship alive and vibrant.”

II. Our hopes and dreams for our life together *(3 min. total)***A. The impact of the weekend**

(CL or CS and LH or LW: A. & B. together, 1.5 min. each)

Briefly speak of hopes and dreams you had for the future as a result of your weekend. Examples: we wanted to make time for each other; we wanted to listen to each other; we wanted to have more fun as a family; we will dialogue every day, will spend less time on the job and more on us.

In delivering this talk we need to show that we are excited about living this lifestyle if the couples are going to buy into it.

B. Changes I made to keep our relationship a priority

Talk about a few of the changes you made as a result of your weekend. In talking about the changes, don't just focus on activities but also share behaviors.

CAUTION: *This talk can sound as though we've made it, rather than that we are working on the many facets of our marriage. It can appear that re-evaluation can be a one shot thing. We can give the impression that we are merely adjusting our old ways to make room for dialogue, and not that we had to change the way we were used to living. If we don't teach them about changing their lifestyle, dialogue becomes a meaningless exercise and they will soon stop.*

III. Couple spirituality (3 min. total)

A. A couple's spirituality is living God's desire for their marriage.

(CL: 1 min.)

Tell the participants that spirituality for a couple is trying to live God's desire for our marriage. Couple spirituality is not pious behavior but rather two people passionately in love. As Christians, God has made us holy to be a couple set apart to live God's desire for our marriage. This necessarily involves the willingness to change and the awareness of a new desire to live intimately and responsibly with each other.

B. It is not easy living God's desire for our marriage, but the result is joy.

(LH or LW: 2 min.)

Expand on clergy's comments by pointing out to the participants that trying to live God's desire for our marriage is not an easy task. The key words are "trying to live" and "willingness to change." Explain how you have developed an attitude of being willing to change. Impress on them that change is not just a one-time event. No matter how hard we try, we'll never have it all together because we all fall back into our old married singles patterns and self-centered behaviors. We fall, but we pick ourselves up again by using the tools that follow. End this section by telling them the result of this effort is joy (link back to the definition/description of joy from "Marriage in Today's World").

IV. Ways to keep our relationship a priority (11 min. total)

In this section we want to give the participants specifics of what will help to keep their relationship a priority. These tools are presented as a package and not as ideas from which they can pick and choose. We're on page 53 of the workbook. Introduce the section by telling them there are five tools: communication (which includes dialogue), sex, prayer, journeying with other committed couples and re-evaluation. The five parts of IV should be balanced in the sharing between lay husband and lay wife with one spouse giving two of them and the other giving three.

A. Constant attention to our communication

(LH or LW: 2 min.)

Tell participants that the first tool for keeping their relationship a priority is being a good communicator of thoughts and feelings. There are three ways that we can accomplish this: through dialogue, attentive listening and active communication in all areas of our relationship.

1. Faithfulness to dialogue

Tell them why and how we dialogue, without being repetitive of previous sharings on dialogue. It would be good to help couples realize they can recreate the experience of the trust they are feeling once they go home through the use of their dialogue. It isn't just in the atmosphere of the weekend that they can trust and risk with one another in dialogue.

Don't spend so much time talking about dialogue that you short-change the other two parts. Communication is more than dialogue. Our communication has to be all day long.

2. Attentive listening

Reinforce being active listeners, also without being repetitive, and here state that active listening shouldn't be reserved just for their dialogue time.

3. Communication in/out of dialogue

You may want to mention voice tone or the listening patterns you are trying to change to communicate better.

B. Attention to our sexual relationship**1. Comprehensive view of our sexuality**

The way we are together (tenderness, playfulness, attentiveness, gentleness, romance) is communicating our sexuality.

(Other lay spouse: 2 min.)

Explain that a broad view of sexuality includes lovemaking as one element. Our sexuality includes tenderness, playfulness, gentleness, attentiveness, romance and other ways a couple daily shows affection for each other. This is not just a list. We need to use personal examples.

2. The importance of our lovemaking

(CL: 1 min.)

Explain the importance of the act of lovemaking which affords a married couple an opportunity for the most intimate, unconditional giving of one to the other. Lovemaking is a very vital and holy part of our Marriage Covenant.

C. Prayer for each other leading to couple prayer

(LH or LW: 2 min.)

Explain the third tool, couple prayer. Let the couples know that statistics show that couples who pray together stay together. Prayer is communicating with, listening to and responding to God as a couple. In this section, tell the participants about your journey in prayer, a journey that not only includes praying for each other but your experience of couple prayer, recognizing that for many of the participants this would be a totally new experience. Explain to the participants how prayer draws us closer as a couple and helps us to recognize that God will not lead us where God's grace cannot sustain us.

D. Journeying with others

(LH or LW: 2 min.)

Tell how you sought out and committed to become involved with couples who shared your values and how sharing of these values reinforces them and lets us know that we are not alone in the struggle to live God's desire for our marriage.

This is the first introduction to Community. All we are trying to explain is that this is one of the tools that help us keep our relationship a priority. Because this life style is counter-cultural, we need the support of other couples living the life style. We need to be walking this walk with others to continue to live the life style. This will help us to keep the hopes and dreams of the weekend alive. Community will be talked about in more depth in the "Continuing our Journey" talk.

E. Re-evaluation

(LH or LW: E. & F., 2 min.)

End with the last tool, re-evaluation. The sharing here needs to be an "I" sharing, i.e., what re-evaluations have I made to change to be more responsible in our relationship. Tell them how making daily decisions to love sensitizes each of us to a lifestyle that involves periodic and regular re-evaluations of how we are living as a couple and what we must do to make our relationship a priority. Share an example of a recent re-evaluation you have made to keep your relationship a priority. Explain to the participants that, although they may have changed as a result of the weekend experience, the world they are going back to has not changed. End this section by saying "The decision to love helps us get back on track."

F. “The question is found on page 54 of the workbook. The wives will stay in the conference room to write.”

Question: In order to make our relationship a priority, what, specifically, am I going to do? How do I feel about my answer?

Writing time: 10 minutes Dialogue time: 10 minutes

Wives stay in the conference room to write

DIALOGUE QUESTIONS TO HELP DEVELOP THIS TALK:

1. After our weekend, in order to keep our relationship a priority, what changes did I make? WAMFRT?
2. How successful was I in sticking to my changes? WAMFAMA?
3. Because of who I am, am I comfortable with change? WAMFAMA?
4. Since our weekend, where do I believe that I have made significant change in our relationship? WAMFAMA?
5. Since our weekend, where do I believe that we have made significant change in our relationship? WAMFAMA?
6. In the last two weeks what specifically have I done to keep our relationship a priority? WAMFAMA?
7. Am I faithful to daily dialogue? WAMFAMA?
8. Do I see dialogue as an ideal; a goal; a challenge; an obligation; an opportunity? WAMFAMA?
9. How am I striving to be an attentive listener? WAMFAMA?
10. In the last two weeks have I romanced you? WAMFAMA?
11. In the last two weeks have we been a playful couple? WAMFAMA?
12. When I hear the words “being playful with you,” I feel _____.
13. How have I been attentive to you in the last two weeks? WAMFAMA?
14. How have I been gentle with you in the last two weeks? WAMFAMA?
15. How important is our lovemaking to our relationship? WAMFAMA?
16. How often have we made love in the last two weeks? WAMFAMA?
17. How important is my prayer life to our relationship? WAMFAMA?
18. Because of who I am, am I comfortable with prayer as a couple? WAMFAMA?
19. How am I journeying with others? WAMFAMA?
20. How do we journey with others? WAMFAMA?
21. When asked to reevaluate, I feel _____. Describe fully.
22. In what area have I reevaluated in our couple relationship in the last six months? WAMFAMA?