

**Reflection Paper**

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Having been married for 18 years and having three children, from my personal experience I feel the below 5 points would be most beneficial to gain insight into before committing to marriage. I consider the 5 chosen points as tools in a toolbox that will educate and empower couples to have healthy marriages. The book 'Saving your marriage before it starts' was a great pre-marital counseling concept while 'A Lasting Promise' was more significant for married couples.



### 1. **The triangular model of love**

“ The triangular model” of love described by Robert Sternberg is a good summary of the right balance for love which has three strong sides passion, commitment, and intimacy. The larger the triangle the more love. Passion is the biological side of the triangle. During this phase, it is evident that the couple spends a lot of their time thinking of each other. In the courtship period for a couple passion seems to be very well understood and is expressed well in the chapters of Song of Solomon. However, unless it links with intimacy it is only self-seeking. Intimacy is when one can be vulnerable and yet feel safe with one another. It depicts God’s love for us. Intimate consummate love between a man and woman called to become one flesh is the sacred intimacy that is a mystery to understanding God’s love for us. If the two people engaging in sexual intercourse are not honest and supportive of each other then the intimacy will be isolated and alone and will not be able to enjoy the mystery of one flesh. During the stages of marriage, one will go through various phases when one of the three sides of the triangle might not be as strong. Imagining the fluidity of the triangle based on the strength of each component of the

triangle has given me a clearer understanding of the concept. I believe it will help every couple regroup and can be used as a constant relationship check-up. Checking in on the health of one's marriage requires work and only couples who are committed to marriage are more prone to do it. The concept of the triangular model of love along with the identification of one's love language, I feel is a great tool for my marriage, and strongly recommend it for couples committing to marry.

## **2. Rules for successful communication**

This is by far the most important aspect every couple needs to work on to ensure that love is not lost in translation. To quote from the book SYMBS "Our differences if not understood and accepted become a source of confusion rather than completeness" (Parrott & Parrott, 2015, p. [Page # 113]). As part of the required counseling needed for the program, I had gone for a few sessions with my husband. With the help of the counselor, we realized that this was a major growth area for us. We realize just like the book mentions in our relationships my communication was directed towards expressing my feelings that I would like to be validated while my husband's belief was communication was directed towards finding a resolution. The below six basic skills of communication are vital not just for couples but all relationships.

a) *Make "I" statements and not "you"...* I would say I have gotten better at this but still working through the same

b) *Practice reflective listening.* The statement in the book “ Women share feelings and men solve problems in conversation” is very relatable to me. We as a couple are still working on this aspect of communication. I see the idea of labeling a conversation as “feeling-talk” or “problem-talk” as a good strategy to implement so it can relax both of us and know what we are seeking from the conversation. We are trying to implement speaker-listener techniques to help us in this area.

c) *Apologize When necessary.* The concept of failing to give a true apology is because one has to swallow one’s pride to admit that we do not like something in ourselves that we need to work on is something which makes me pause and reflect. If coming from a place of genuine love, apologizing when an error of judgment happens gets easier. However, if coming from a place of pride or not wanting to be wrong then it is more difficult to have a sincere apology where the partner can truly feel respect and love. As I write this I had to face a phone call which I tried my best to handle most effectively. However, when I hung up I was convicted that I need to practice enjoying being the calm in the storm instead of feeling disappointed that it took so much of my time. Is it pride that I have to play the role of being the organizer and comforter instead of thankfulness for the opportunity to serve my husband with love? I need to put before the Lord in prayer as I work on this communication skill.

d) *Power down and get offline.* This has not been much of a struggle for my marriage as it has been a conscious decision to keep the gadgets away so we are present in the conversation. I see technology as a potential issue in terms of coming in the way of forming an intimate

relationship, as social media starts filling in the gaps of companionship. This would get couples content about not spending as much time with each other and jeopardizing the intimacy in their relationship. I need to keep a watch out for the same.

e) *Communicate through touch*. This is an excellent non-verbal communication blessing that helps couples recharge and feel loved. Understanding each other's family of origin is high contact or low contact along with exploring each other's comfort zones will be a great asset for a married couple. This is an area my husband and I need to talk about as growing up with similar family rules we tend to live a life similar to our families of origin. I can see how this area might be testing us to step out of our comfort zone but it will help us identify areas that can further strengthen our marriage.

### **3. Understanding Amy and Flo to fight the good fight**

“Worry, fear, anxiety comes naturally. What does not come naturally are behaviors that allow you to cope more effectively with thoughts, feelings, sensations one experiences when stressed.” (Stanley et al., 2014, p. [Page #119]) As the book mentions that with experiences we end up forming a habit of having a negative or positive mindset. The question is how do we reprogram ourselves or form new habits that help us cope peacefully when stressors come our way? This is why I was fascinated with the concept of Amy (Amygdala) and Flo (Frontal lobes). Understanding the science behind the way our brains think and the body reacts will help us pause to relearn responses. Amygdala is a small part of the brain that is part of the control

center which causes the brain to respond right now. It helps determine if a situation requires one to get into fight or flight mode. It is all about action and does not give time for thought. Eg: when someone loses their temper and is uncontrollable it reflects the amygdala in control. Flo is situated in the prefrontal cortex of the brain. It contains the most cells in our brain that respond to the feel-good chemical called dopamine which plays a pivotal role in our ability to pay attention, plan, have self-control, and accomplish goals. I am starting to implement the same when I find myself getting wired up to take a deep breath, helping flo to take over so I can have more controlled responses. However, it is not always that flo can function efficiently as it gets tired. The book uses the word the decider-flo gets tired and when that happens the slider -Amy is ready to rock and roll. One of the tools that I feel might help couples maintain harmony for Amy and Flo is learning breathing techniques and using TIP statements:

**T** is for trigger: State what partner did or said or what circumstance started the ignition to hurt/anger

**I** is for Impact: Stating how one feels and being careful not to say negative things about the partner

**P** is for Preference: Say what you wish would have happened and not about what you expect your spouse to say or do

#### **4. Spiritual Intimacy**

The book A lasting promise mentions the mystery of oneness like a diamond with many facets- spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual. Oneness is a spiritual mystery that is explained by the concept of the chord of three that cannot be broken. The covenant that God enters into

with the couple through the sanctity of marriage where man and woman become one flesh to whom God provides direction and meaning to the bond of love. It helps one act toward one's spouse out of love and casts out fear as the dependence is on God who strengthens marriage. The verse quoted from Psalm 127:1 " Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders' labor is in vain." This is exactly what married couples also get to enjoy as the couple works towards and through their marriage. This intimacy gets to be easily understood and felt when couples are yoked well. However, for couples who may not be similarly yoked, God still works with the believer and there may be an opportunity through the spiritual intimacy of the believing partner that the unbeliever may be saved. What stood out for me in the concept of spiritual intimacy was the concept of the man and woman not merging, but instead, the relationship is one where husband and wife who are their individual parts with their own unique giftedness and talents, are now surrounded by God to create a powerful new entity that is unique to that relationship and is a mystery of oneness. I believe this is the reason the couple gets to be involved in the bigger purpose of reflecting God's light to the world they live in. As iron sharpens iron, couples help strengthen their spiritual intimacy either by doing devotionals together or sharing what God is impressing on each other's hearts which gives them the strength to face challenges and form strong marriages. For my husband and I, our spiritual intimacy helped us cope with the loss of our first two miscarriages. It was also the binding factor that helped us take joy in the common interests of serving the body of Christ, raising our children, and decisions for our everyday life. The fact that we share our faith is the reason how we serve does not end up becoming a religious activity that has to be fulfilled but has a natural flow to a way of life that we enjoy.

## 5. Prayer and Meditation

I feel this is the most important aspect that every individual needs to live a healthy life. It was prayers with tears that helped me cope with the adjustments of being a newlywed. Today when I look back every tear, every cry for help that I made with a sincere heart has been answered. As I get older I am joyful that the power of prayer to praise is what I am forming a habit to witness. Couples who end up praying together get blessed with the wholesome experience of marriage. The verse quoted in the book 'A Lasting Promise' gives a good understanding of the practice of prayer and meditation." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you "(1 Peter 5:6,7). Couples who develop the habit of praying together are purposefully acknowledging the presence of God who has the ultimate authority and power. For those couples who are not of the same faith prayer becomes the only tool that helps the believer be able to withstand the stress, anxiety, and differences the couple may have. Prayer is talking to God and bringing in front of him your weaknesses, struggles, and challenges. It is a purifying process and it develops a habit of the discipline of seeking God's help in situations one feels helpless, and anxious and forces one to look at the condition of one's heart to understand the feelings behind the emotion. In the beginning years of our marriage, we would read streams of the desert a devotional together as a couple which helped us get into the habit of meditating together. Meditation through breathing techniques is another useful technique that helps one to be aware of one's senses and helps calm oneself. Practicing calming techniques and mindfulness through breathing will help increase the oxygen levels in the brain which will help one be more relaxed when faced with stressors. The reason I put prayer and meditation together as it is a

great way to practice both simultaneously. All during the day one can make it a habit to practice mindfulness coupled with a quick check-in with one's heavenly father through prayer.

### **Citation**

- Parrott, L., & Parrott, L. L. (2015). Saving your marriage before it starts: Seven questions to ask before--and after--your marriage (Newly expanded edition, SYMBIS Assessment special edition. ed.). Zondervan.

- Stanley, S., Trathen, D., McCain, S., & Bryan, M. (2014). A lasting promise: A Christian guide to fighting for your marriage (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.