



Four Stages of a Marriage

These are the four stages of a marriage:

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| Stage I: | NEW LOVE | - The honeymoon begins and two individuals begin blending their lives. |
| Stage II: | SHARED LOVE | - The first child arrives...and love must now be shared! |
| Stage III: | MATURE LOVE | - The first child become a teen...and love had better be mature! |
| Stage IV: | RENEWED LOVE | - The last child is launched into the real world...and love can now be renewed. |



Stage I: New Love

The Challenges

When a couple marries, things change. Before, they were together because they felt loving feelings for each other. Now they are also together because they are *married*! The knowledge that there is a legal and moral tie "binding" them to each other may create uncertainty over how much they "romantically" love each other. The more a spouse thinks about this "obligation" of marriage, the less there are thoughts of being together out of choice to love and be loved. Some couples focus so strongly on this sense of obligation, they kill romance and thus begin to feel "trapped" in the marriage. Other couples fail to value their commitment to each other and wind up divorced because one or both become romantically displeased with the other.

The tension between romantic attraction and permanent commitment remains throughout marriage. The enduring and fulfilling marriage maintains a balance affirming the importance of both romantic love and permanent commitment before God and each other.

After the wedding ceremony, newly-weds try desperately to get along, but they come from two different family backgrounds. Sooner or later, one newly-wed expects the spouse to do or be some- thing according to the patterns or "rules" of his / her own family of origin. This expectation conflicts with the spouse's family of origin patterns or "rules."

During the "honeymoon" phase of Stage I, both partners usually give in to appease the other, putting aside their feelings to maintain harmony in the relationship. But as differences become more apparent, tension mounts, conflicts grow, and disillusionment may set in. The couple must "leave" the expectations, "rules" and often unresolved emotions of two separate families in order to "cleave" to each other in their new family relationship. The "honeymoon" is over. The challenges of Stage I are in full force.

Assessment: How Are We Doing With These Challenges?

Check the statements which you believe are true:

- ☐ In-laws don't control our schedule, finances, or other decisions.
- ☐ We don't have recurring power struggles over who "wins" in everyday decisions.
- ☐ I am not consistently hurt by my spouse not measuring up to my expectations.
- ☐ We have established our "couple" identity with common interests, couple friends, and our own traditions.
- ☐ We tend to quickly confess wrong and genuinely forgive each other over inevitable hurts.
- ☐ We have established a mutually satisfying sexual relationship.

Total: 0 - 2 checked = major concern

3 - 4 checked = needs improvement

5 - 6 checked = doing well with this stage; keep working to maintain the strengths



Experiencing Intimacy Ingredients In Stage I

Affectionate Caring: "I care about you."

What did you do originally that contributed to you falling in love? Do again the things you did before you were married, especially if you have stopped doing them: special cards, fun dates, flowers, unexpected gifts, extended "talk times."

When your partner is upset, anxious, or hurt, don't try to "fix it;" rather, just listen and offer comfort.

Resist waiting for your partner to take the initiative in verbalizing love or showing affection. You move first!

Tell your spouse you're sad when he/she has been hurt or disappointed, because you care about his/her feelings.

Vulnerable Communication: "I trust you."

Practice open-ended questions: "Tell me something about your day," is better than "How was your day?"

Protect time for quiet talks—or the tyranny of other things will crowd them out.

Seek your spouse's advice and comfort first, before talking to other family members, friends, or acquaintances.

Invite conversation about feelings, fears, dreams, and hurts—just listen and care.

Joint Accomplishment: "I need you."

Develop common interests, hobbies, and fun diversions; take the initiative to suggest ideas.

Develop a common budget and joint finances.

Read a good book together.

Creatively share specific ways you appreciate your spouse, boldly declaring, "I need you."

Mutual Giving: "I love you."

Begin listing all you are grateful for; this prompts the desire to give.

Give to meet your partner's needs in the ways that your partner enjoys, not necessarily in the ways you enjoy.

Seek to know the needs your partner missed growing up, such as attention, appreciation, affection, etc., and strive to especially give what your partner missed.

Encourage your partner to share needs; probe as necessary to discern how you can best demonstrate your love; "*Darling, I'm sensing that you may be needing something from me right now—Would you like to tell me what it might be?*"

Given where we are in Stage I, I need to give more attention and effort to _____



Experiencing Intimacy Ingredients In Stage II

Affectionate Caring: "I care about you."

Prioritize couple "dates" for special romantic times alone-no kids, no friends, just the two of you.

Express empathy and compassion when your partner has had a rough day.

Don't forget special gifts, love notes, and "I was thinking of you" phone calls.

Be ready and willing? to "help out" with expanded parenting responsibilities.

Vulnerable Communication: "I trust you."

Take time to share together the joys of watching your child grow up; make family times a priority.

Be vulnerable in expressing your needs for affection and sexual intimacy.

Discuss any differences or concerns about each other's parenting decisions privately.

Express appreciation and support in front of your children: "We sure have a special dad, don't we, kids?"

Joint Accomplishment: "I need you."

Develop a sense of togetherness and one-ness about parenting goals and discipline strategies.

Read and discuss good parenting books: *The Father Book* by Minirth, Newman, and Warren, and *Things That Go Bump in the Night* by Warren and Minirth.

Develop friendships with other families who will positively influence your children.

Develop new interests or hobbies together as a couple.

Mutual Giving: "I love you."

Share parenting responsibilities in order to give each other individual relaxation time or diversions.

Creatively plan for romantic times alone in your own home.

Always have a fun get-away time scheduled to look forward to.

Don't sweat the small stuff; defer to each other on minor parenting decisions.

Given where we are in Stage II, I need to give more attention and effort to _____



Stage II: Shared Love

The Challenges

As newborns arrive and begin to grow, they fortify their parents' belief in the inherent "fallenness" of human beings! Usually, during the child's second year, the couple realizes that the child has a will of his own which differs vastly from the will of his parents. Decisions must be made about when and how to discipline the child.

Most of us dislike discipline. It is an emotional issue with a family history—actually two family histories. As a child, each partner was disciplined differently for different reasons. And each partner may have strong feelings about the way his parents handled discipline.

Thus the terrible two's can be terrible for the parents; new and highly emotional decisions about child rearing intensifies conflict over who makes the rules. These conflicts may even upset the previous balance of power within the marriage.

When the child is five or six, usually he enters school. Suddenly, the family, through the child, is on public display. How the child behaves reflects on the parents. Negative reports from school authorities may rekindle open conflict between the parents.

Also when a child enters school, time schedules change; adjustments in lifestyle must be made. Both husband and wife may be involved heavily in their careers while juggling too many family responsibilities. Lonely and hungry for closeness but with little time set aside for intimacy, they may be ripe for an affair.

Assessment: How Are We Doing With These Challenges?

Check the statements which you believe are true:

- ☐ We have recognized and overcome some of the hidden agendas or "expectations" we each brought from our childhood.
- ☐ Neither work pressures or the children's needs prevent us from regularly setting aside special times just for us.
- ☐ I no longer doubt that my spouse is God's special provision for me.
- ☐ My partner's peculiar imperfections are not stealing my joy in marriage.
- ☐ We seem to focus more on giving to each other than on being preoccupied with what we're "getting."
- ☐ I've come to see many of my shortcomings and how my spouse balances me with his/her strengths.

Total: 0 - 2 checked = major concern

3 - 4 checked = needs improvement

5 - 6 checked = doing well with this stage; keep working to maintain the strengths



Stage III: Mature Love

The Challenges

This stage is called "Mature Love" because that is what you will need to successfully navigate the countless competing demands and challenges. The arrival of teenagers signals the beginning of this stage. Be prepared for your love to be tested. Those once loveable youngsters may change overnight into moody, uncommunicative strangers who don't want to be hugged and who may be anything but appreciative.

During this stage, parents are often at a crossroads in their own careers. They may be struggling to make ends meet just as college expenses loom on the horizon. Many mothers reenter the work force, sometimes leaving teens or other family members to care for the household. As the so-called "sandwich generation," Stage III couples may also have to deal with the challenges of caring for aging parents.

Teenagers challenge family rules and family structure. Intimacy patterns are disrupted-sitting down to play board games may have been eagerly anticipated a few years prior, but not now. The family may struggle with defining significant ways to enjoy being together, especially if there are other children younger than teenagers. It is no wonder that this stage is usually a time of low marriage satisfaction for both husbands and wives. With several children in the home, Stage III may be extended for a long period, often compounding the stress.

Assessment: How Are We Doing With These Challenges?

Check the statements which you believe are true:

- ☐ Each of us has established a fulfilling life through our gifts, talents, hobbies, and skills.
- ☐ We work well as a team in dealing with our kids, so that they are not able to manipulate us against each other.
- ☐ I have come to recognize the imperfections in my growing up years, have felt the feelings from those years, and have received understanding and comfort from my spouse.
- ☐ We give priority time to our marriage without complaining or resentment. Our kids are becoming our friends as we release them to live their own lives.
- ☐ We have addressed the pending loss of our children, jobs, and parents by deepening our couple relationships and by pursuing new dreams with each other.

Total: 0 - 2 checked = major concern

3 - 4 checked = needs improvement

5 - 6 checked = doing well with this stage; keep working to maintain the strengths



Experiencing Intimacy Ingredients In Stage III

Affectionate Caring: "I care about you."

Get away for a weekend, just the two of you, to rekindle romance and refocus your goals.

Connect with each other emotionally as you part each morning and as you reunite in the evening.

Express affection for each other in front of your teenagers, sitting together, holding hands, cuddling, embracing.

Apologize when you're wrong—when you have been impatient, intolerant, or insensitive to your spouse or children.

Vulnerable Communication: "I trust you."

Don't keep your seemingly insignificant joys and blessings to yourself. Share them with your partner. As you evaluate your goals, directions, and involvements, plan for specific times for sharing your "mid-life journey" with each other. Be attentive, supportive, and understanding as you receive each other's sharing.

Begin talking about life "beyond the children." Begin to develop goals and plans for the "empty nest." As a couple, seek the input and counsel of other couples who have done well (or at least survived) this stage. Their perspectives and mentoring can be invaluable.

Joint Accomplishment: "I need you."

Continue Marriage Staff Meetings to plan your parenting strategies, resolving problems as they arise. Flood your spouse with expressions of appreciation—adolescents can drain your emotional and physical energy without showing much appreciation.

Involve one another in your favorite activities or hobbies. Be alert to self-reliant, independent patterns of relating.

Support each other empathetically; if you sense your spouse experienced regrets or disappointments, express comfort, such as, "Honey, I hurt for you that you felt discouraged today. I love you."

Mutual Giving: "I love you."

Review your partner's current priority of intimacy needs. Plan how you might meet those needs. If you are unsure, inquire, "I'd really like to meet your needs this week. What might I do that would help you feel loved and special?"

Remain available during your partner's "down" times, looking to God to meet your needs so that you can be supportive of your partner during these difficult periods.

Pray together often during critical times of decision or discipline, entrusting your children to the Lord. Be comforting in response to your partner's childhood reflections, since pain may surface as parents age and die.

Given where we are in Stage III, I need to give more attention and effort to _____



Stage IV: Renewed Love

The Challenges

In this longest of the four stages, couples return to where they began twenty or thirty years earlier. The nest is empty, and for better or worse, they are alone together again. With twenty to forty years ahead of them in this stage, couples must work to readjust their relationship, support their children's movement into the adult world, and perhaps become grandparents.

As teenage children become adults and leave the nest, some parents find their offspring's move away from home traumatic, especially if that child has been the emotional focus of one or both parents. Some couples divorce after the last child leaves, explaining, *"We only stayed together for the sake of the children."*

When a couple's children marry and have children, the couple must accept changes in the structure and functioning of their own family. For some parents who have already "let their child go," the transition to grandparent-hood is relatively easy. But parents who have retained tight control of their child even after the child marries may become caught up in the affairs of their child's family. Accepting a different role as advisors and peers to their children may be difficult. One especially dangerous pattern is the grandparent who forms a "coalition" with a grandchild against the parent.

A significant challenge for Stage IV couples is to define a fresh purpose for living—a renewed vision with significant goals and directions. Meeting this challenge helps these couples avoid over- involvement with their grown children—the couple has other things to do!

In a society that glorifies youth, Stage IV couples need to gain a sense of mastery over their lives and a feeling that they are meaningfully contributing to their world.

Assessment: How Are We Doing With These Challenges?

Check the statements which you believe are true:

- _____ I am free from a preoccupation with age and / or health that would hinder me from enjoying life.
- _____ I consistently experience intimacy in my marriage, so that my children leaving the nest won't pose a threat to my marital happiness.
- _____ We are careful not to lead separate, self-reliant lives that would hinder our intimacy.
- _____ I am able to experience the simple joy of being alive today.
- _____ I am able to be a good friend to my grown children without trying to run their lives.
- _____ We are developing a fresh vision, purposes, goals, and plans for the rest of our lives together.

Total: 0 - 2 checked= major concern

3 - 4 checked = needs improvement

5 - 6 checked = doing well with this stage; keep working to maintain the strengths

Intimate Encounters Teaching Curriculum Reproducible Master - 15.1



Experiencing Intimacy Ingredients In Stage IV

Affectionate Caring: "I care about you."

Begin discussion and planning for a "second honeymoon" trip to rekindle romance and celebrate your new freedom!

Creatively expressing your love and appreciation never grows old-send cards, leave notes, buy gifts, or send flowers.

Read and discuss books on renewing romance and sexual intimacy, such as *Love Life for Every Married Couple* by Dr. Ed Wheat.

Express respectful, appreciative comments in public about your spouse. Send the message that he or she is special!

Vulnerable Communication: "I trust you."

Express empathetic concern to encourage your spouse to share anxieties and fears: "You seem a little anxious about something, sweetheart. I'd sure like to listen and give whatever support I can. "

Take time to reflect on fond memories and your gratitude for what you have. This guards against becoming negative and seeing life as "half empty."

Dream together about things you would still like to do. Mutually support each other in accomplishing them.

Share your spiritual journey and devotional life; cultivate spiritual and emotional closeness.

Joint Accomplishment: "I need you."

Get involved together in ministry, making your experience, time, talents, and gifts available for God's use.

Discuss and finalize financial and other plans related to your future, retirement, aging, and death. Rekindle some hobbies or common interests you formerly shared, or discover new ones.

Cultivate two or three new couple friendships each year to expand your horizons and keep life interesting.

Mutual Giving: "I love you."

Give your partner time, encouragement, and "permission" to pursue individual interests, hobbies, or other goals.

Support each other in family traditions, holidays, and grandparenting times. Be personally involved with your grandkids—don't delegate this role to your spouse.

Gently comfort your spouse during life's inevitable and painful losses.

Continue giving to meet your spouse's intimacy needs, such as attention, respect, acceptance, affection, appreciation, and security. Occasionally ask your spouse, "*I'd like to help you feel loved and special—how might I contribute to that for you right now?*"

Given where we are in Stage IV, I need to give more attention and effort to _____



Four Intimacy Ingredients

These four ingredients are required in a "recipe" for intimacy in each stage of marriage:

Affectionate Caring: "I care about you."

Emotional caring that reassures a hurting spouse or initiates verbal or physical affection. Doing things to meet each other's needs motivated by positive feelings for each other.

Can be hindered by: Unhealed hurt; Unresolved anger

Vulnerable Communication: "I trust you."

Risking openness about feelings, needs, and hurts, willing to trust that I won't be ignored, rejected, or hurt even more.

Can be hindered by: Fear

Joint Accomplishment: "I need you. "

Closeness that comes from experiencing "we did it!" Includes sharing common interests, setting joint goals, or feeling mutual excitement over an important event, such as a baby's birth, a son's graduation, or a daughter's wedding.

Can be hindered by: Self-sufficiency

Mutual Giving: "I love you."

Doing things to meet each other's needs out of commitment and a sincere desire to help the other person feel loved. Each person thinking more highly of the other, seeking to show love in ways especially meaningful to the other person. Giving even when one doesn't feel like it.

Can be hindered by: Selfishness



Marriage Staff Meeting - Session 15

In addition to any calendar coordination, planning, goal evaluation or healing of hurts you need to do,

1. Look again at the Marriage Stage sheets for each stage. Discuss these questions:
 - a. From the description of the challenges and from the assessment questions, do we seem to have some catching up to do to deal with issues we missed when we were in previous stages? If so, what issues?
 - b. What do we especially need to deal with or accomplish in our current stage?
 - c. What opportunities do we see as we anticipate the road that lies ahead? What feelings do we each have?
2. How did you complete the "*Given where we are in Stage _____, I need to give more attention and effort to...*" statement for your current stage? (Complete this sentence now if you haven't already, drawing from the ideas under each intimacy ingredient.) Share your response with your spouse.
3. Identify clearly: What are the specific steps which each of you are willing to take at this time? Write these here if necessary:

Husband:

Wife:

4. What would you most desire that your spouse consider doing? Ask each other to tell what that would be. Honestly respond to this request:
(Example request and response:)
"Honey, I would really like for you to tell me what I might to do give to you in our current stage."
"I would really appreciate it if we could plan some fun romantic times together. Would this be possible?"
5. Close your staff meeting with "Perfect Love" praying: Each of you pray, asking God to enable you to be or do specifically what your spouse has said he or she desires.