

## 8 Little Secrets to a Healthy Marriage

Probably the most frequently asked question I get in counseling from married couples and those preparing for marriage is this: Where do we get that little book that tells us how to do everything right the first time, how to stay in love, and cultivate a healthy and happy relationship? And to the surprise of all, it just doesn't exist. I am not talking about the Bible, which is our Source of life and faith, or some little publication by Dr. James Dobson of *Focus on the Family*. What I am talking about is that small hypothetical little blue (instead of black) book the preacher was supposed to secretly hand over to the husband right before he says the "I do." Or perhaps, the husband's father was supposed to pass it down from when his father gave it to him. I will assume that everyone knows what I am talking about here.

Well, that book doesn't exist, that I know of, and most every couple in counseling has told me that if I would write such a book that it would be a best-seller. It doesn't need to be a thick book. It just has to contain that vital information in it that keeps the marriage relationship healthy and keeps both men and women from making those costly mistakes that unnecessarily damage the marriage.

So I thought I would give it a try and create such a small book in the hope that it aides those who consider marriage to be the pinnacle of family existence. Here I will share eight core secrets. Here is the first secret to a healthy marriage:

### **Secret 1:     *Full Disclosure of Moneys - No Hidden Accounts***

Money may appear to be the root of all evil but it is really the love of money that reveals the root of all evil. That being said, money seems to cause so much trouble in households and puts undue pressure on marriages when it need not. But all too often husbands and wives keep hidden things from one another in the form of hidden monetary accounts and various means of not fully disclosing their moneys.

Spouses need to be fully and completely open with one another about any and **ALL** money that each has: pension accounts, insurance, savings, 401(k), retirement, checking, rainy-day money (mad money), anything and everything. Doing so helps to prevent loss of moneys in the event of an illness or early death. But the most important reason of this first secret is so that both spouses can be equally empowered in the relationship. Money is power, so to speak but it is the spousal relationship that is to be empowered not the money.

This is not to say that couples can't have multiple accounts or set up their banking in any fashion that works well for them. Just don't keep any monetary secrets from one another. When one spouse eventually finds out (and they will!) it is a much like the feeling when an affair has taken place; it is an act of mistrust. It is a violation. As all spouses know well, violations and mistrust are not good for the relationship!

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Husbands: if you have any moneys hidden away in private accounts, even with regard to the business you are in, please come clean with your spouse. Fully disclose this information with your wife and do it ASAP!

Wives: if you have any hidden accounts to keep your husbands out of the loop, even with regard to the business you are in, please come clean with your spouse. Fully disclose this information with your wife and do it ASAP!

Bringing out the hidden things can empower each other and can create an environment in the family of equality and the sharing of power. This is vital to keeping the love and intimacy healthy in the marriage relationship.

### Secret 2

So, we continue with secret number two: ***Each spouse must become a skilled cryptographer or develop competent communication skills.*** Those who served in the military know what a cryptographer does: a person trained in breaking codes, the secret communication patterns intended to hide what is really being said. Husbands and wives really do speak different languages. It can be difficult to interpret what the other intends to say at times. Either the husband has to magically interpret the hidden codes in his wife's conversations or he has to develop competent communication skills. Those spouses that have healthy marriages have worked hard to develop competent communication skills to understand the other.

Prime example: husband comes home from a hard stressful day of work and wants to watch TV and unwind. Wife enters the room and wants to connect with her husband about his day. What ends up happening is a confrontation that never should have happened. The two spouses collide together in misunderstanding and end up experiencing rejection from the other. All because each doesn't know the other's language.

Good communication is not just a marriage related issue. Quoting from the April 2005 issue of LabMedicine Journal, volume 36, number 4, on page 205, "Business consultants and counselors vouch that communication is the number one problem in the workplace and in interpersonal relationships. Misunderstood communication is one of the largest problems facing organizations today. While communication problems might not be eliminated, they can be certainly reduced, and often avoided."

How do spouses develop competent communication skills? Husbands and wives need to take time to ask each other what they mean and clarify, clarify, clarify! Husbands: clarify what you mean when you say you just want to sit and watch TV after work. Tell you wife that it DOESN'T mean you are avoiding her all evening long. Tell her that you will do it for a certain amount of

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time and then will be available to talk with her afterwards. Tell her how important that time is for you. **HUSBANDS:** Do not think that all your wishes and wants will somehow be transferred to your wife by osmosis. She doesn't know but what you tell her. She can't be expected to read between all the lines and figure out the secret man language you are using. And when you are desiring intimacy with your wife, sometimes she can miss it. If left to her own devices, she will misunderstand something you did not adequately communicate! So what do you do? Clarify, explain, and communicate.

Wives, as well, speak a totally different language than husbands. They speak with emotion, with connection, with a desire that their husbands will take an interest in them and in their day. Wives speak with depth, even when they seem shallow to their husbands. But wives, you too will have to clarify what you mean when you come home and want to spend time with your husband. He doesn't understand the emotional connections, the need to be needed, the need for spoken words of affirmation, the need to be told "I love you" and to be cuddled at night before bed. Many times you speak in a foreign language; and when you are desiring romance, he can totally miss it. **Wives:** Do not think that your wishes and wants will be magically transferred to your husband by osmosis. He needs for you to clarify, explain, and communicate.

To put it another way, if we don't communicate, then we will be distant, confused, and lost. Eventually, the relationship grows apart and dissolves; without communication, without connection, we die. Newborn infants have to be held after birth to develop normally. Child friendships develop because two persons find common areas of connection and interest. We are not made to be alone for our life. Husbands and wives are brought together to be complementary and connectational.

*Marriage demands excellence of the husband and the wife.* The old adage of "we've been married for 40 years and we haven't had a communication problem since I told her who was the boss" doesn't hold water anymore. Our parents and grandparents may have been able to scuff off not having had good communication skills and made us believe as if it was just fine and dandy to operate in misunderstanding and disconnection. 2005 is different. Husbands and wives operate in equality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Gone are the days of the false notions of male domination and "women are to keep silent."

Though it may not be rocket science, it can seem like it when poor communication habits have developed in family systems and have not been changed (or even challenged). Imagine that you got married or have been married many years only to find out that your spouse just never seems to understand you. If you feel as if you have tried all else and failed, know that Pathways Pastoral Counseling stands ready to be of help to you and your marriage. Whether you have been married a short time or a long time, it can be a valuable process to reevaluate the communication patterns in the family system.

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Good communication empowers both spouses in love and harmony. Good communication keeps you connected to the other in understanding and clarity. And when problems arise and misunderstandings creep through the relationship, having established a pattern of understanding helps to ward off unnecessary arguments and family problems.

### Secret 3

So far we have amassed two great secrets to helping married couples function with more honesty and empowerment. In review, secret number one was: ***No hidden accounts- full disclosure of moneys***. Secret number two was: ***Each spouse must become a skilled cryptographer or develop competent communication skills***. Each of these *secrets* is intended to add to what both spouses are already doing well creating a healthier, and possibly happier, marriage.

Secret number three: ***Words empower: praise your spouse often in public and private.***

It is rather easy at the start of a marriage, or even after years of marriage, for many couples to begin to gnaw on the other. Those little things that each does that totally irritates the other - small comments of complaint or disgust to the other spouse for the way they look, what they do, how they are, what is said, etc. Over time these small forms of rejection build up to form an emotional wall that forms between you and your spouse. Even if such small comments are unintentional or even part of your relationship, those comments do emotional damage when it need not.

Words can do allot of damage and equally words can bring inner healing and health. We all long for our parents to praise us for succeeding in life, for choosing a good partner, for having beautiful children, or for carrying on the family values. Equally, spouses long to hear those powerful words of affirmation from the other. Spousal comments can have the weight of parental comments.

More than just words of affirmation, praising the other spouse when you are out in public draws attention to the spouse's strengths and abilities. It is a way of recognizing the VALUE you place in your spouse. It is more than just bragging on them, it is attaching the high value to them by recognizing their importance to you.

I know many of you reading this know well enough the complaints both husbands and wives have shared about the other in public places. I don't need to share here the kinds of things you all have said about your spouse. We have all done it. But the bad part is how damaging it is to the other spouse, much like being slandered in public. Every time you share with another person a deficiency or problem in your spouse, you are slandering an aspect of your marriage, your covenant with them. You are actually lowering their value to you and after a while the sum of all they are can get quite low. If your marriage was a value stock on the emotional stock market, would it gain in value over time or lose in value over time?



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Husbands: note the patterns in your life with your guy buddies as to how you speak of your wife to them. Do you praise your wife in front of them, noting the things she does well and the appreciation you have for her. If you begin to do this, your friends will begin to be envious of you and your relationship. They will wish to be like you. What a strong witness that can be for both your marriage and your faith.

Wives: note the patterns in your life with your girl friends as to how you speak of your husband to them. Do you praise your husband in front of your girlfriends, do you tell them about the things he does well and your appreciation for him? If you start doing this, they will wish they had as great a husband. What a powerful witness it is for a wife to praise her husband in public.

I certainly do not think that you have to lie and make up something about the other spouse. This isn't about ego or trying to psych them into doing something right. It is about acknowledging the strengths and abilities of the other. It is about attaching a high value that is rightfully present.

It is important to praise your spouse in public, where others can attest and lay witness to your statements, but it is equally important to speak praise to your spouse within their listening range. Spouses, take moments to tell the other what you appreciate in them. Speaking words of praise to your spouse in private gives feedback directly to them, helping to strengthen their emotional foundations in the relationship. Tell your spouse what they are doing well and how that makes you feel. Share with them that you feel stronger in your faith because of their support for you. Tell them that the words of beauty and the words of love are meaningful and helpful.

Words are powerful elements within our culture and life. As you find yourself praising your spouse for their strengths and abilities, you will find yourself thinking more about them in your day. And the small things that irritate, even the mistakes that are made, seem more manageable. Such communication with your spouse creates a healthier environment by which to address the things that may be getting in the way of the relationship.

Words are indeed powerful! Put that power into action by praising your spouse in public and private. Start today!

### **Secret 4**

Let us do a quick review of the current secrets to having a healthier and perhaps happier marriage. The first secret revealed the intention to fully disclose any moneys by both spouses for equal empowerment. The second secret revealed the need to be good communicators for the purpose of establishing healthy communication lines between husband and wife. The third secret revealed the need for spouses to speak well of one another in both public and private spaces

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therefore strengthening and affirming the relationship, as well as providing healthier means to address any problems in the relationship.

And now to secret number four: ***After the fight, review the match.*** Spousal arguments and verbal fights are a part of the marriage relationship. After all, marriage is the union between man and woman bringing together varying experiences, perspectives, learnings, and ideas that, at times, can be as variant as night is from day. It is not uncommon for men and women to have those explosive times of disagreement, hurt, and varying opinions. The real question is whether in such heated debates or disagreement the couple knows how to fight/argue and reflect appropriately after the fight.

Let me first say that in just about any spousal heated disagreement usually there is no intentional attention to fairness. If you are fighting, it is one for all and all for one! So to try to set up some sort of fair fighting ritual for spouses is, for the most part, unrealistic. You wouldn't be fighting if it was to be fair! But what you can do is to reflect after the fight in such a way that honors and respects the other spouse. Just maybe the husband and wife can learn about the other to minimize future encounters of such. Consider the value of what spouses can do after the fight that brings opportunities for reconciliation and peace back into the relationship.

After the fight and after the heated moment has passed, make an intentional act to sit down with your spouse and review the argument/fight. Take the emotion out of it for a moment and agree with your spouse to review the aspects of the fight. It is at this point that REAL learning can take place. Make it an intentional action to honor each other and respect each other during this time. Recognize the fact that the fight is over so that there no longer needs to be a ***winner or a loser*** mentality. Then position yourselves as equals again during the review. Remember the goal is to honor and respect the other during the review. What was being said? Why was it important for either person at the time? How did each feel during the fight? Did one spouse feel utterly rejected and emotionally punished? Did the words shared further support already existing feelings of low sense of self? Listen and consider, of equal value, the words of your spouse. *When one spouse is sharing, don't interrupt them.* Let each share and complete their thought. The goal here is to reconnect with your spouse and reflect upon what just took place.

So what does doing this secret really accomplish? For one it supports the notion of creating a healthy and happy marriage. It supports the previous secrets in respecting the other spouse. Doing this secret accomplishes the true meaning of your covenantal relationship with your spouse.

Reviewing the match after the fight also communicates to the other spouse that words hurt, that things are said in the heated moment that neither of you may have meant, that it may not have been worth taking the effort to fight over something as small or large as the issue was. Perhaps the issue of the fight *was* significant and it is time to tackle it for change rather than continue to

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avoid it or sweep it "under the table." Whatever the circumstances or reasons, reviewing the fight offers opportunity for both spouses to consider it from a less or non-emotional position. It is then, and only then, that real change can take place.

Positive change almost never takes place within a fight or argument. Because of the nature of the fight and the stressors/tactics at work, positive change doesn't have a good foundation in which to be planted. Words of rejection, words of anger, words of opinion or experience are lobbed at the other in negativity, in hurt, in pain, and in tactic. The only thing that can come of it, typically, is more hurt and pain.

After couples review a few matches and are willing to learn from them, couples will notice an almost immediate change to the buttons that cause the arguments. Spousal fights and arguments most notably are caused by fear, insecurity, and hurt within the relationship. ***After the fight, review the match*** can be an effective way to learn about those insecurities and fears and perhaps work towards healing them. Spousal fights, over time, will decrease significantly. Harmony and peace are much easily restored in the relationship.

### Secret 5

#### **Secret number 5: Finding the Self in the We - Spousal Space at its Best or Worst.**

You've seen them. Those married couples who seem glued to each other at the hip. One can't do anything without the other, all the time. Maybe you have seen the other couples who never seem to do anything but live under the same roof, almost as if they were two married strangers. Where is the balance? We all know that the healthy marriage finds a workable balance of the individual self in the midst of the partnership of covenant relationship.

But finding the **Self** in the **We** can be quite challenging. For some men, it takes a full fledged announcement of "spousal space" by going fishing on the pond or playing a sporting event with oneself or with others, notably *without* the spouse. How can a husband and wife communicate a sense of individual space in the midst of the **we** in the relationship without hurting the other or feeling rejected.

The whole topic of *spousal space* is hardly ever an issue for newly weds, who seem all too eager to share and experience everything together within their sense of marital bliss. But after the honeymoon period is over, the husband longs for those times of being to himself: the tinkering, playing, hobbies, projects, and interests that he brought into the relationship. Likewise, the wife may want to reconnect with her interests or take on new ones now that she is married. The shared home becomes the newest battleground that has to be fought over and over each day/week in order for each to reclaim a sense of the **Self** in the **We** of the marriage.

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Certainly communication is at the heart of the matter in sharing with each other the needs for spousal space. What I want to propose in this article is that there is a Self in the We and that it is vital that the Self be explored and nurtured in the marriage relationship. Husbands and wives need to connect with their individual selves and nurture that part of the relationship with their individual self. If not, the marriage will suffer. Emotional enmeshment and codependence can occur to the detriment of the marriage and family.

For families with children, the children need to see both mom and dad in their individual states, satisfying their individual interests and hobbies. It teaches the children that mom and dad are two individuals that choose to come together as a team in leadership, authority, discipline, and function but also to separate into two individuals that have differing interests. Boys get to see the male and female qualities they need to learn; girls get to see male and female qualities they need to learn. Esteem and a healthy sense of self are strengthened to the betterment of the marriage, to the fruit of the partnership.

Nurturing the Self in the marriage helps to sustain a healthy sense of self. When the husband has time to read a book or explore a project he is able to add to those qualities that make up who he is. When the wife has time to spend with her friends or to take a trip by herself she is nurturing those qualities that make up who she is. Too many times these are not communicated and spouses assume their own needs. Misunderstanding takes place when spouses have to fight over mental spousal space. Those are the times of disconnection, disharmony in the marriage, and general feelings of low self esteem.

Work on finding your sense of **Self** within the **We** of the marriage relationship - spousal space at its best!

### **Secret 6**

Dating. You thought it finally ended when you got married. If you are like many, dating was so hard. Those unrealized expectations, paying for the date, the kiss at the door, going bowling, going to the movies, double-dating with friends, going to the beach.. ah the days of dating. Where did the time go?

**Secret number six is this: Dating Never Ends.** I know there are guys right now reading this cursing my name. Heck, that's the reason you got married was so you didn't have to be confined by the rules of dating. You could be intimate without feeling like you were doing something wrong. No more kissing behind the bleachers, no more running off on a romantic run without the parents knowing.

But those with healthy marriage relationships will say over and over how important dates are to the success of their relationship. Couples settle in their relationship after being married, even for

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a few years. The newness wears off. Expectations become the norm in the relationship. Marriage boredom begins to set in.

I would like to propose to you that dating is healthy for a married relationship. It is healthy because it keeps certain the marriage relationship surprisingly fresh and new. There are rules to dating and it is good for those rules to continue in the marriage. A quick review of the rules (for both the man and woman) of dating: holding hands (frequently), opening the door for your wife, creating an environment where your wife feels special, loved, and respected, dressing up to go out, communicating your feelings for the other, taking time to share about the significant aspects of your week with one another, sharing a romantic moment together. And let us not forget the most important rule of dating: where the two of you are share those spontaneous moments of connecting with the other that sends chills up the spine! Dating is all about new experiences, new feelings, and the building together of trust, respect, and a sense of honor.

But isn't marriage about getting beyond all that stuff? Aren't marriages supposed to be like what our grandparents had: sleeping in separate beds, no exchange of emotions, no holding hands, certainly no PDA (Public Display of Affection), two people living under the same roof just co-existing? That sounds more like a business deal than a marriage. Well, that isn't what I signed up for and I hope you didn't sign up for that either!

Spouses: go out on dates frequently. I suggest setting a scheduled time on a regular basis for date night. Make it a priority above your work schedule or even family schedule. Set it up only equal to your time with God, for isn't our time with God a model for our time with one another? Dating wasn't rocket science when we were younger. It need not be in our marriage either.

If you have been married for a long time and have lost the zeal of passion that brought you together with your spouse many years ago, consider the concept of dating once again. If you have been remarried or just married for a few years then dating may still be fresh for you. Stay with it. Incorporate it as a vital part of your relationship.

Husbands and Wives: Go out on a date with one another. It will do your marriage good. I guarantee it!

### **Secret 7**

#### ***Secret seven:* Share in the Spirit: Worship Together!**

The seventh secret in this series concerns the spiritual aspect of your relationship. We readily recognize that a relationship, and especially a marriage relationship, consists of various parts needed to create a sense of wholeness and well-being. Those parts are (1) the physical aspects of the relationship, (2) the mental or psychological aspects of the relationship, and (3) the spiritual

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aspects of the relationship. These three parts make up what individuals need as well to create a sense of wholeness and well-being.

I get asked quite frequently whether it is fine for couples to have their differing religious practices and whether it is healthy to worship in different places separately. While the reasons are varied and perhaps valid, making worship and spirituality/ faith simply a individual private experience within the marriage defeats part of what God has provided for the two of you to experience together. Worship can be a very individually intimate experience. Times of devotion and prayer alone in a room can be special encounters with God and those are certainly healthy aspects of our relationship with God. But God has brought together the husband and the wife to be partners, complementing one another and creating a powerful sense of oneness. "The two shall become one," is a concept which can find manifestation as couples experience God together in worship, prayer, study, and Communion/Eucharist.

Say the husband is Catholic and the wife is Pentecostal. Who gives up their practices and traditions for the other? The husband is Non-denominational and the wife is Presbyterian. Which spouse compromises on their traditions for the other? It seems all too much as either/or.

I would like to propose a third option that may not have been previously considered. God's purpose for faith within the marriage relationship is not for one tradition to win out over the other, pitting each spouse's faith tradition against the other in conflict. Instead, I would like to propose that husbands and wives worship together on a regular basis and share in the practical application of their faith perspectives with one another regularly.

What does this mean? Far be it from me to say that the Pentecostal wife must leave her faith tradition to go to the Episcopal Church on Sunday mornings just to keep peace with her husband. But what if, at home, both spouses made it an active part of their shared faith to have set-aside times to worship, listen to music or sing a song together and do a devotion together, taking time to pray together and not just at the evening meal. What if, both spouses set aside time together to share in a spiritual thought or application to a problem/issue encountered within that week and discussed it together in a way that respected one another.

Secret number 7 is for spouses *to share in the Spirit of God and worship together*, to find common times, ways, and means to connect together in the presence of God. Doing so strengthens the bond that connects you to each other because it recognizes that the One who brought you together is an active part of your life.

It is not uncommon for married couples, who go to different churches because of their upbringing or backgrounds, to begin to find common ground as they worship, pray, sing, read, study, and talk to one another about their faith; common ground that creates a safe space to find a

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common church or place to worship together, taking what is experienced at home in private to a place with others who share in similar expressions.

It is a powerful experience when husbands and wives come together in unity to worship God, two becoming one in faith, in practice, in vision, and in experience. One's faith will always be between them and God but when it can be shared and experienced together it can also be a rewardingly rich encounter. It blesses God and it in turn blesses the other. It communicates value, importance, priority, and structure.

I know that there are many couples reading this that are not able to share their faith journeys with one another, for various reasons. You do not worship together, study together, pray together, or experience God together and it grieves your soul. You may be praying for it and searching God for it because you feel that is one aspect of your marriage that is needed.

This is one reason Pathways Pastoral Counseling exists, to help persons like you find the peace and mechanisms to bring about healthy positive change be it in the physical aspects of your marriage, the psychological/mental aspects of your marriage, or the spiritual aspects of your marriage. If you need help and wonder if someone can help in your situation simply call and ask. Pathways is here to serve you. Feel free to call the office at 864-542-3019 and set up an appointment. Help is just a phone call away.

Couples: Secret number seven really can do wonders to creating a healthier and potentially happier marriage. *Worship together regularly and share in the Spirit.* It is good for the marriage!

### **Secret 8**

My hope and prayer has been that this series has had some value for you. If you have been blessed by this or it has helped in any way, would you take a moment and email me and let me know? It would be good to have feedback directly from you with any helpful suggestions as to other topics that you would like to see written about. You can email me at:

[DrTrey@PathwaysPC.com](mailto:DrTrey@PathwaysPC.com) .

This running series of secrets to helping you and your spouse create and maintain a healthy marriage relationship has contained 7 secrets so far. Those secrets have been:

- 1) Full Disclosure of Moneys- No hidden accounts
- 2) Each Spouse must become a skilled cryptographer or develop competent communication skills.
- 3) Words Empower- Praise your spouse often in public and private
- 4) After the fight, review the match
- 5) Finding the Self in the We- Spousal Space at its best or worst

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- 6) Dating Never Ends
- 7) Share in the Spirit: Worship Together

The final secret in this series, the long awaited for secret number eight is this: **Develop a shared vision for your relationship and review every year.**

Many persons get married with assumptions and lots of them! We assume that our spouse will save money like we do, that our spouse will have the same thoughts on child rearing like we do, that our spouse will have the same dreams, visions, and goals in the relationship as we do. However, most of you reading this article know well that this is not the case. For husband and wife to have these things in common, it takes talking about those ideas, it takes planning and perhaps an intentional framework in which to establish common goals or visions.

I think it is helpful to have a shared vision for your relationship. Perhaps your children are already grown, out of college and you both have been saving the money you had been paying for your children to go to college. Having been used to paying out \$12,000 each year to XYZ University, you have found it easier to keep socking away that money for a new car in 3 years. What if you find after the 3 years of amassing nearly \$40k that you decide not to spend it on the car but instead want to invest it. For three whole years it has been the goal of the new car and now at the last moment hubby changes his mind! Or perhaps you have been saving for retirement and one spouse decides they want to use some of that money to purchase an addition to the home.

Perhaps your issue is that you were hoping to travel more after retirement or that your life together was going to change for you. The wife wants to travel more, experience other countries and cultures. The husband just wants to stay around town, go to Hardees every Tuesday with the guys, and then go fishing and playing golf. You may feel frustrated that this wasn't what you signed up for in retirement!

So how do married couples figure out what the future will hold? No one, except God, can know what the future holds. We are, at best, to take each day at a time. Though we may plan for retirement with savings, investments, and end of life care earlier in our life, our life plans do change, visions and goals change, and circumstances in life change. What we thought 10 years ago might not be applicable now.

So what to do? I say review the goals and visions for your marriage every year. Every year it would be helpful for couples to review their financial goals, their retirement goals, family goals, and what you are doing with your relationship. We take our cars in for tune-ups every 60k miles, replace the car engine oil every 3000 miles; we are to do maintenance on our home furnace system every winter, replace the batteries in our fire alarms twice a year, replace our roof every

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20 years; we take the time to have heart-to-heart talks with our friends every few years, so why do we ignore our marriage needs on a regular maintenance schedule?

What if you had to renew your marriage license every year like the state requires for your drivers license every ten years? What if it was a requirement to re-evaluate the relationship, the goals of the marriage, the plans for the present and future?

Interesting thought. So why not make it a priority in your marriage to take the time and effort to re-evaluate where you are going with your marriage, what the plans are for the next few years, the goals of savings, the goals of your time and energy together and apart.

I would like to suggest to you that this could be one of the best kept secrets to having a healthy marriage. When a husband and wife sit down and assess their life together, it is an excellent way to honor one another, to remember what God has done with you over the past five years, to create an opportunity for husband and wife to re-connect their ideas or explore new ones. It is an excellent way to catch the vision again or create a new one. What happens after our last child leaves college or gets married? What is the purpose of our life together if we choose not to have children? Where will we be in one, three, or five years with our relationship, our trust in one another, our desire to help others, our need to contribute back to the community in some way?

And this is where most couples start assuming. We ASSUME that when it becomes a problem that we will address it. If it ain't broke, don't fix it! But we don't have that mentality about anything else in our life. We maintain those things that we appreciate and need. So, maintain your marriage. Attend to the needs of each other and reassess those needs every couple of years. Have the guts to ask the tough questions. Take the risk to share your concerns with one another. Have bad habits developed or is life breaking you apart? Does the vision seem lost in the midst of what life, work, and family is doing to you now? Do you want to change some things in your marriage? Are there enough times for intimacy and being together? Is the relationship of the marriage satisfying to you both?

The every year re-evaluation need not be a chore. Make it a special weekend get-a-way to a romantic or relaxing resort. Own it and let it be an important aspect of your relationship to consider where you have come and where you are going as a family/couple. Be courageous to make changes, to address patterns of behavior or patterns of communication, if needed. Communicate with one another your needs and wants.

**Develop a shared vision for your relationship and review that vision every year.** It is good for the marriage!

Grace and Peace,  
Dr. Trey Kuhne