

*The Four Seasons*  
*Of Marriage*

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Two are better than one...if one falls down,  
his friend can help him up. But pity the man who  
falls down and has no one to pick him up.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

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## The Nature of Marriage

Psalm 34:3 "Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together."

From a biblical perspective, the purpose of life is not to accomplish our own objectives!  
The purpose of life is to know God and to bring glory and honor to His name.  
In marriage we can commit to seek and follow God's plan for our lives and point others to God.

Man and Woman...

- have the capacity to make *decisions*
- choose *attitudes\** and *actions* that will improve and strengthen our marriages  
(\*the way we think about or interpret what we experience)
- plant seeds of *love* and *hope* in the **spring** that will produce fruit during the **summer**
- harvest a storehouse of good feelings and open communication that will prepare us to weather the *changes* of **fall** and the icy cold of **winter**
- The social institution of marriage is first and foremost a **covenant** relationship with God
- in which a man and a woman pledge themselves to each other for a lifetime partnership.

### THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF MARRIAGE

**Committed**

**United**

**Intimate**

**Purposeful**

**Complementary**

## WINTER

Season of marriage created not by the difficulties of life but by the manner in which a couple responds to those difficulties

- EMOTIONS:** Hurt, anger, disappointment, loneliness, feeling rejected
- ATTITUDES:** Negativity, discouragement, frustration, hopelessness
- ACTIONS:** Destructive, speaking harshly, not speaking, withdrawal, violent acts

**Climate of Relationship:** Detached, cold, harsh, bitter. In the winter season of marriage, couples are unwilling to negotiate differences. Conversations turn to arguments, or spouses withdraw in silence. There is no sense of togetherness. The marriage is like two people living in separate igloos.

**The POSITIVE side of Winter:** The marriage may appear beyond hope, BUT don't give up. Often, couples are desperate enough to seek help for healing. God can use marital winters for good...Romans 8:28-29

"affirm faith"

"grow in character"

"produce patience and perseverance" James 1:2-4

"Christ-like love" 1 Peter 4:8

## SPRING

A season of new beginnings where most marriages begin

- EMOTIONS:** Excitement, joy, hope
- ATTITUDES:** Anticipation, optimism, gratitude, love, trust
- ACTIONS:** Nurturing, planning, communicating, seeking help when needed

**Climate of Relationship:** Vital, tender, open, caring. Streams of communication are flowing. Sense of excitement about life together. Couples are making plans. Great hopes for the future. Planting seeds from which they hope to reap a harvest of happiness.

**The DOWNSIDE of Spring:**

Unexpected and unannounced "irritations" ruin a perfect vacation or turn a fine dinner into an emotional fiasco. These irritations do not change the season, but they make springtime less enjoyable. Share your irritations with your spouse, and be open to change. Nurture positive changes, and you will enjoy the fun of summer. When we Fail to follow through with new beginnings, we may skip summer and slip right into fall or winter.

## SUMMER

Season when the gardener reaps the benefits of what was planted and nurtured in the spring

**EMOTIONS:** Happiness, satisfaction, accomplishment, connection, peace, fun

**ATTITUDES:** Trust, commitment to grow, relaxed. Positive Attitude!!

**ACTIONS:** Communicating constructively, accepting differences, praying together. Attending seminars, reading/listening to books. Growing spiritually.

**Climate of Relationship:**

Comfortable, attached, supportive, understanding. In summer season dreams of spring have come true. High satisfaction from *their* accomplishments. They are resolving conflicts in a positive manner. Seeking to turn differences into assets for their relationship. Husbands and wives have a growing sense of togetherness.

**The DOWNSIDE of Summer:**

Unseen level in our marriage where we have pushed unresolved issues. These unresolved issues can show up unexpectedly. We then find ourselves arguing in the middle of summer. Issues must be dealt with to continue living in the summer season of marriage.

## FALL

The most colorful season of the year, a prelude to winter  
Soon the chilling winds will rip off the leaves, leaving the tree bare.

**EMOTIONS:** Fear, sadness, confused, frustrated, dejection, apprehension, discouragement, resentment, unappreciated, emotionally depleted.

**ATTITUDES:** Great concern, uncertainty, blaming, disengagement.

**ACTIONS:** Neglect of each other, failure to seek resolution of issues. NO ACTION at all.

**Climate of  
Relationship:**

Drifting apart, disengaging emotionally. Couples sense that something is happening but they're not sure what. Sense of detachment, feelings of neglect. Couples realize there are issues they are not facing squarely. Each blames the other for the issues. If they have lived in the fall season for awhile, their family and friends may be recognizing the changes.

**Making the most of Fall:**

Couples are usually in the early stages of fall before they realize it. They have been busy with activities, enjoying life but sometimes ignoring each other. They are living in the afterglow of summer, but each is slowly disengaging. The uncertainties of fall can be redemptive if they turn in the right direction. Couples can end up in winter if they let "nature take its course."

## MARITAL SEASONS PROFILE

Marriage relationships are constantly changing.

Circle one word or phrase per row that best represents your thoughts and feelings about your marriage in the past several weeks. Tally up the number of circles in each column. Your score will range from 0 to 16 for each of the four columns. Interpretation of scores will be provided.

**Please take this profile independently without discussion until you have tabulated your results.**

	<u>Column 1</u>	<u>Column 2</u>	<u>Column 3</u>	<u>Column 4</u>
1.	Discouraging	Exciting	Satisfying	Uncertain
2.	Hopeless	Happy	Peaceful	Confusing
3.	Empty	Hopeful	Committed	Stressful
4.	Harsh	Nurturing	Secure	Frustrating
5.	Resentful	Open	Trusting	Tired
6.	Destructive	Fresh	Relaxed	Distant
7.	Rejection	Anticipation	Appreciation	Apprehension
8.	Tension	Sharing	Honest	Drifting
9.	Give up	Making Plans	Teamwork	Apathetic
10.	Critical	Caring	Connected	Concerned
11.	Angry	Joyful	Understanding	Burned out
12.	Disappointed	Optimistic	Comfortable	Neglectful
13.	Untrusting	Tender	Supportive	Afraid
14.	Withdrawn	Growing	Attached	Detached
15.	Cold	Alive	Content	Prideful
16.	Unforgiving	Willing to change	Overlook flaws	Growing apart
	Total Column 1	Total Column 2	Total Column 3	Total Column 4

**Commit yourself to work for the best possible marriage you can have.  
Marriages either grow or they regress; they never stand still.**

## Seven Strategies to Enhance the Seasons of Your Marriage

These strategies will challenge you to *develop positive attitudes and actions* that will greatly enhance the *emotional climate* of your marriage. Your *attitudes and actions* will affect your *emotions* as well as your spouse's. These biblically based strategies will give you practical ideas for keeping your marriage alive and growing.

### Strategy 1: Deal With Past Failures

- Every married couple needs to understand this strategy, but couples in the fall and winter seasons will need to spend more time here identifying and processing past failures.
- "Why can't we forget the past and focus on the present and the future?" We have to deal with the past before we can put it behind us. Otherwise, it keeps popping back up.
- Dealing with past failures involves three steps.

#### STEP 1: IDENTIFYING PAST FAILURES

-Hard work of identifying your own failures

Matthew 7:3-5

Psalm 139:23-24

Satan does not want you to be honest.

Satan wants you to blame others for your sinful behavior

Satan will tell you to defend yourself.

DO NOT YIELD TO THAT TEMPTATION

-List all the ways your spouse has hurt you through the years

Write a letter to your spouse (sample p.75-76)

Begin each listing with; "I felt..."

#### STEP 2: CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE

- Psalm 51

- 1 John 1:9

- Romans 5: 8-11

*Confession means "to agree with"*

*Your behavior has pained your spouse*

*AND has grieved God's heart.*

*Repentance means "to turn around and walk in the opposite direction.*

*Requires the power of the Holy Spirit.*

## Strategy 1: (cont'd)

### STEP 3: FORGIVENESS

Luke 17: 3

I Corinthians 13: 5

*Forgiveness is a decision not to bring up past failures.*

*It means we recognize that Christ has already paid the penalty for our sins.*

## Strategy 2: Choose a Winning Attitude

- Most athletes would agree that winning is 90% attitude and 10% hard work.
- What we think largely influences what we do. This attitude and action connection opens a door of HOPE for all couples.
- How we interpret what happens to us ( our attitude) leads to failure/success.

### A Christian Worldview:

A biblical perspective on life makes it easier for couples to have a positive mental attitude.

#### Characteristics of a Christian Worldview

1. Every human being is made in the image of God and is therefore extremely valuable.
2. Each person is uniquely gifted by God (including the mentally and physically challenged).
3. Each person has a unique role to play in life.
4. Marriage is God's idea. Husbands and wives are intended to complement each other.
5. The object of marriage is to glorify God by serving one's spouse and helping the spouse reach his or her God-given potential!

## Strategy 2: cont'd

### Breaking the Cycle of Negativity

1. We must acknowledge our negative thinking. If we rationalize our negative attitudes as legitimate, they will NEVER change. If we think negatively, we will behave in destructive ways.
2. Identify your spouse's positive characteristics. Ask God to bring to your mind all the positive things about your spouse AND write them down.
3. FOCUS on those positive traits and thank God for each one. Ask God to turn your thinking towards positive.
4. Ask God to give you a biblical perspective of your spouse. Re-read the 5 characteristics of a Christian Worldview and thank God for these 5 realities that reflect your spouse.
5. Frequently express your appreciation verbally to your spouse.

### Strategy 3: LEARN TO SPEAK YOUR SPOUSE'S LOVE LANGUAGE

- Western culture is obsessed with love.
- Love is an essential human need.
- Largely ignorant of the true nature of love and its effect on human relationships

**Emotional Love Tank:** When the emotional love tank is empty, marriages slip into fall and winter.

First stage of love - lasts about two years.

1. Romantic love - Attraction "*tingles*" that get "*tinglier*." WOW!
2. Emotional obsession - most wonderful person, no flaws
3. Euphoric stage of love - does not require a lot of effort

Second stage of love - reality sets in. Now requires a conscious effort to meet emotional needs of the other person.

1. Feelings begin to fade
2. Illusion of perfection is gone
3. Differences now become obvious

\*\*\*\*\* Many couples fail to make the transition. Instead, they get the "*tingles*" for someone else.

\*\*\*\*\* Divorce - Remarry #1 = 60% experience a second divorce  
Remarry #2 = 75% divorce rate

## The Five Love Languages

Each person has a primary love language that we must learn to speak if we want a person to feel loved.

1. Words of Affirmation spoken praise and appreciation
2. Acts of Service Actions speak louder than words.  
"Doing" to help your spouse \*\*\* ASK your spouse, "what is helping."
3. Receiving Gifts Little things mean a lot.  
Birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, and "no occasion" days
4. Quality Time Giving undivided attention  
Turn off TV  
Look into spouse's eyes  
Listen and interact
5. Physical Touch Take the initiative to reach out and touch.  
Hand on shoulder while you walk  
Holding hands  
Touching leg while you drive together  
Kissing, embracing, sexual intercourse

**Emotional Love Tank:** Marriages can move from fall and winter to spring and summer as you fill the tank by speaking your spouse's love language.

- Understanding and speaking your spouse's love language may not be easy at first.
- You learn to speak a new love language by trying, trying, and again trying....
- READ or LISTEN to **The Five Love Languages** by Gary Chapman.  
\*\* Read together or alone if spouse is not interested\*\*

### Unconditional Love:

It is easy to love your spouse when your spouse is loving you.  
It is easy to say kind words when you are being treated kindly.

Unconditional love means you will **choose** to love your spouse in his or her PRIMARY LOVE LANGUAGE.

\*\*Romans 5:8 "while we were still sinners Christ died for us"

\*\*1 John 4:19 we love God "because HE first loved us"

\*\* Romans 5:5 "God has poured out HIS love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit"

## **Strategy 4: Develop the Awesome Power of Empathetic Listening**

Empathy means to enter into another person's world, seek to walk in his or her shoes, and see the world from his or her perspective.

### ***The Four Keys Of Empathetic Listening***

1. Listen with an attitude of understanding (not judgment).
2. Withhold judgment on your spouse's ideas.
3. Affirm your spouse, even when you disagree with his or her ideas.
4. Share your own ideas only when your spouse feels understood.

### **Learning the Skills of Empathetic Listening:**

Pray, asking God as did St. Francis of Assisi, "O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to... be understood as to understand."

1. Listen with your eyes.
2. Listen with your mouth.
3. Listen with your neck.
4. Listen with your hands.
5. Listen with your back.
6. Listen with your feet.
7. Listen for feelings as well as for facts.
8. As you listen, try to see the situation from your spouse's perspective.
9. Resist the urge to share your perspective before your spouse feels understood.
10. Seek to clarify your understanding of your spouse's ideas by asking reflective questions.
11. Seek to clarify your understanding of your spouse's emotions by asking reflective questions.
12. Summarize your understanding of your mate's thoughts and feelings.
13. Affirm your spouse's thoughts and feelings verbally.
14. Request permission to share your perspective.

\*\*\* When you seek to resolve - rather than win - an argument, you not only discover workable solutions but also find intimacy with your spouse.

## STRATEGY 5: Discover the Joy of Helping Your Spouse Succeed

What is success? Ask a dozen people and you may get a dozen answers.

Look back to the "biblical worldview" on page 8.  
Are these statements in line with a biblical worldview?

\*\*\* "Making the most of who you are with what you got"

\*\*\* A truly successful person is one who helps others succeed.

Few would deny Jesus Christ has had the most positive impact on human history.

1. Jesus led by serving others. John 13:14-15, 17
2. Jesus "went around doing good." Acts 10:38
3. Jesus' order of greatness was upside down. Matt. 20:26

\*\*\* We need to have an acute **change of heart**. Give your ego centered life up to the Lord.  
Ask Him to give you the attitude of Christ - putting others before ourselves.  
Serving our spouse as Christ served his followers

Once your heart attitude is changed, you will need to learn how to express service in ways that will help your spouse reach his or her potential for good.

### Three Simple Questions To Help Your Spouse Succeed

1. What can I do to help you?
2. How can I make your life easier?
3. How can I be a better husband (wife)?

### Four Practical Ways to Help Your Spouse Succeed

1. Offer encouraging words.
2. Take supportive action.
3. Provide emotional support.
4. Express respect for your spouse.

The ultimate purpose in marriage is that a husband and wife will help each other accomplish the purpose for which God created them. When this happens, both spouses experience the ultimate joy of cooperating with God to accomplish His purposes.

## Strategy 6: MAXIMIZE YOUR DIFFERENCES

In the fall season of marriage, our differences begin to be magnified.  
In the winter season, our differences stand as icy walls that divide us.

In God's plan, differences were never intended to divide us.

- When God instituted marriage between two unique individuals, He knew He was creating unity. Genesis 2:24 marital unity
- Our differences are designed to be complementary, not to cause conflict. I Corinthians 12
- Together under God's direction, differences are assets not liabilities.

Dr. Chapman (p136) is convinced there are no irreconcilable differences,  
**ONLY**  
People who refuse to reconcile.

### Identify Your Differences

The following list of common differences may help to identify differences in our marriages.

<u>Spouse A</u>	<u>Spouse B</u>
1. Talker	Quiet and reflective
2. Early riser	"Don't do mornings"
3. Make things happen	Reads about happenings
4. Homebodies	Partygoers
5. Let's be logical	It doesn't feel right
6. Penny pinchers	Spenders (you can't take it with you)
7. Avid readers	TV addicts
8. Country western	Symphony

### **FIVE STEPS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR DIFFERENCES**

1. Identify your differences
2. Look for assets in your differences
3. Learn from your differences
4. Replace condemnation with affirmation
5. Discover a plan for maximizing your differences

## Strategy 7: IMPLEMENT the POWER of POSITIVE INFLUENCE

- If your marriage is in the season of winter or fall, you are probably alone reading books to have a better marriage.
- Based on past experience and your current circumstances, you have little hope that your spouse will join you now.
- Consequently, you may have resigned yourself to the idea that your spouse will never change.

You see only two sorry alternatives:

1. Tolerate a life of misery
2. Get out of the marriage and hope for something better

*TRUE - You cannot change your spouse.*

We are individuals and have free will.

No one can force us to change our thoughts and behavior.

*TRUE - You can and do influence your spouse.*

We are relational beings who are influenced

by our five senses, especially seeing and hearing.

The power of influence has profound implications for the seasons of marriage. However, we first must acknowledge that we cannot:

- directly change our spouse's personality or behavior
- control how they think or feel or words they speak

We can make requests, **BUT** we cannot be assured they will respond positively.

This "Power of Positive Influence" takes us right back to **UNCONDITIONAL LOVE**

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Ed Wheat, M.D. has written a book, Love Life for Every Married Couple. Chapter 15, pages 228-236 tells "The Love Story of Hosea." This is a first person narrative written by Dr. John W. Reed. Hosea, who has been "called the prophet of the broken heart," prefers to be "remembered as the prophet of love and hope." Hosea gives a personal account of life with his wife Gomer and how they came to be a family "happy and at peace." This is a wonderful recounting of God's unconditional love for each of us.