

Safety Gates for Marriage

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During the first years of our marriage, we soon realised that we would have to set boundaries, lay down rules (so to speak) and talk about the values we wanted to build on as a couple going forward in a fruitful marriage. Marriage is a leap of faith. You are each other's safety net. You need to instill healthy habits for a healthy marriage, therefore it is important to make decisions together on what would be best in each situation. Here are a few of these principles to consider.

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Transforming Thoughts

The most important principle (or 'safety gate') for us was to not imitate the ideals and opinions of the culture around us, but to be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how we think. The focus for us was not to transform the way we **feel** but the way we **think**. This empowered us to discern God's will.

We love to see how Jesus transforms hearts and how couples start to shift in their approach, perspective and opinion when they build shared values, based on the Word of God. Everyone wants to improve their marriage, but the problem is that everyone wants instant improvement. Improving your marriage does not happen overnight. Like any other goal you want to achieve in life, it takes time, effort and energy to create a marriage you love being in.

Attitudes

The first thing you need to adjust is your attitude. You need to start with an honest assessment about yourself. Step back and consider your own attitude before you start trying to change your spouse's, then you will be heading in the right direction. Athletes can't win the prize if they don't follow the rules. Likewise, in marriage we have to 'set rules' and boundaries for growth.

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Self-Image

In adjusting our attitude, we need to be honest about how we see ourselves. This has an impact on our marriage. When we struggle with low self-esteem, it is a thinking disorder in that we view ourselves as inadequate or incompetent. Self-esteem is based on a system of pictures and feelings you have put together about yourself. It includes both mental and emotional pictures and feelings. *'As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.* (Proverbs 23:7)

The way you feel about and see yourself is how you will be and act in marriage. When you step into this trap of low self-esteem, your spouse will constantly have to convince you that you are loved, accepted and good enough. This causes your relationship to be one-sided and the one who is always trying to convince you becomes worn down.

Handling Conflict

One of the safety gates we need to put in place is how we handle conflict. Somehow we seem to handle conflict as if we are a parent talking to a child. The moment we do this, it creates a defensive barrier. Talk adult-to-adult. Use 'I feel' messages, e.g. 'I feel upset when you come home late'. Do not attack or belittle your spouse. When we handle conflict correctly, God can use it to grow us and strengthen our marriage, as we don't have to defend our case anymore.

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A marriage starts thriving when we put aside what our spouse deserves and respond by giving him or her what they need. Don't try to get even in your marriage (or any other relationship). Build each other up! Rise above the offence and give your spouse what they need!

When your marriage needs healing, work through the conflict until the pain subsides. When the pain subsides, the trouble might not be corrected. Deeper issues must be dealt with. Don't only try to solve the underlying problems, keep working at it until you have complete victory, not just when the pain recedes.

Stewarding Money

Be careful not to live a money-centered life. It is easy to get caught up in the pursuit of wealth and material possessions. 1 Timothy 6:6-10 warns us that God is to be our focus, not money. We can easily be influenced by our money-centered society. God loves the generous giver, so be careful that you do not turn the principle around by grabbing and holding onto everything you want and only give from the leftovers. If this is your focus with finance and possessions, this too could become the state of your relationship; a sense of entitlement, holding onto, grabbing and wanting more and more. Hear the words of Psalm 23 that says, *'I shall not want'*. Our God is a God that gives and marriage is a wonderful place to imitate this principle.

Creating a Home

Be sure to create a home. In a *house*, people can be staying together without sharing life. A *home* is where people live together, share and serve each other and make room for others. In this current culture, our worth can be found in climbing the ladder of personal success or other activities that, in themselves, are not wrong but which have the potential to separate us from our spouse and Godly

relationships with those around us.

This could result in a husband and wife not talking to one another and hardly seeing or noticing their children. Decide as a couple what godly values you want to build on in your relationship. Family identity has to do with who you are and what you stand for. Talk about it, communicate it and live it! Make 1 Peter 4:8-9 your family mission: *'Above all, constantly echo God's intense love for one another, for love will be a canopy over a multitude of sins. Be compassionate to foreigners without complaining'* (paraphrased in 'The Passion' translation).

Make Room for Your Spouse

Make room for your spouse, in your heart and in your schedule! Serve each other, honour and care for each other. You have such a great opportunity to demonstrate God's love to each other. When your spouse feels honoured and cared for, they receive others so much more easily into their hearts. Duplicate to others the Godly fervour you have for each other.