

Relationship Revolution

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The longevity and quality of any relationship is dependent on your optimistic outlook. Optimism is the discipline of believing the best about our spouse, which in turn, cultivates hope for our future together. Maintaining a positive focus and holding on to hope plays an important protective role in your marriage.



SESSION OBJECTIVES

This session is designed to help you:

- (a)** Understand the predictive power of belief
- (b)** Dance the two-step tango which cultivates authentic hope
- (c)** Look at the future of your marriage with optimism

Optimism versus Pessimism

Relational outlook is so important for marriage because optimistic couples see their problems as temporary, transient and tenable. Challenges are seen as limited in scope and able to be overcome. Unfortunately, pessimistic couples tend to exacerbate single issues, causing them to spill over and colour the entire relationship. As such, problems become personal, with heated emotions serving to compound problems and make them chronic. The way you view the future of your marriage, therefore, is not subject to chance. It's a discipline of the mind and management of emotions.

Martin Seligman, a pioneering psychologist in the field of motivation and positive psychology, defines optimism as a learnt perceptual style of thought which tends to see problems as temporary, non-personal, and limited in scope. On the flip side, pessimism sees problems as personal, pervasive and even permanent.

The automatic interpretations you have of your spouse's words and actions can have significant ramifications for the health and mood of your relationship. It's not so much what is said and done, rather, it's how you interpret your spouse's motivations. Successful couples make an agreement with each other to choose to see and believe the best about one another. **Could you do the same?**





Do you recognise any pessimistic interpretations that may need to become optimistic?



PESSIMISTIC



OPTIMISTIC

SITUATION: “We really need to cut back on spending. We’re repeatedly exceeding our budget?”

INTERPRETATION: Attack

“He/she is always blaming me for overspending. Don’t they know prices increase? We might have additional expenses now.”

INTERPRETATION: Responsibility

“Let’s review our budget and spending habits to see where our expenses have increased, and how we can better adjust.”

SITUATION: Spouse is late for a lunch date and not responding to text messages.

INTERPRETATION: Critical

“So typical. Late again. And now, they’re not even responding to my messages. This just shows how little they care about me!”

INTERPRETATION: Concern

“Maybe they got stuck at work or in traffic. Maybe they’re driving and that’s likely why they haven’t replied. I hope they’re OK.”

SITUATION: “It’s seems as though as soon as we clean up this place, it gets messy again.”

INTERPRETATION: Inequality

“He/she is so messy. They never clean up after themselves and expect me to do more than my fair share. It’s not fair.”

INTERPRETATION: Solution focused

“I think we need a better strategy for keeping this place clean. Can you help me brainstorm what we can do better?”

SITUATION: Disclosure of temptation that’s been given into or bad habit that’s become intrusive.

INTERPRETATION: Condemnation

“I knew it. How dare they. This is like a form of betrayal. How can I stay married to them if they can’t exercise self-discipline?”

INTERPRETATION: Compassion

“I’m so thankful to you for your courage and honesty in telling me. With God on our side, we can overcome this together.”

Don't just think bigger, think better!

**POSITIVITY ISN'T
WISHFUL THINKING,
IT'S A DISCIPLINE
OF MIND.**



Entrenched pre-conceptions

While the interpretations you make about your spouse's motives or intentions are often triggered by their words or actions (or even inaction), they're typically governed by entrenched pre-conceptions. In other words, interpretations are formed by equal reflection of **YOUR** belief systems, as they are of **YOUR SPOUSE'S** behaviour. As a consequence, the future outlook of your marriage will be viewed through your pre-existing lens of optimism or pessimism. The good news is, you can learn to change lenses by examining your default interpretations.



In the following example, consider the different pre-existing beliefs that may lead to either optimistic or pessimistic interpretations and reactions. **How might you respond?**

SITUATION: Limited love life – Spouse doesn't respond enthusiastically to sexual advances

BELIEVE:	INTERPRETATION:	REACTION:
A: INADEQUATE	I'm probably a bad lover	Self-blame/loathing
B: SECURITY	They're likely dealing with personal stuff	Kind, caring and considerate
C: SELF-DOUBT	He/she doesn't find me attractive anymore	Self-protective defense
D: SELF-DOUBT	I'm unlovable or unworthy	Withdrawal
E: CONFIDENCE	Perhaps there's a concern or unmet need	Discuss, troubleshoot
F: GROWTH MINDSET	Maybe I can improve my approach	Explore intimacy alternatives



If your interpretation is pessimistic, call into question your own pre-conceptions.

From the following list of questions, which would be the best to ask yourself?




Have I enquired if something might be troubling them?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there perhaps another, more optimistic, interpretation?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have I considered things with their perspective?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do I hold myself to the same standard?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have I clearly communicated my concern or desire?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is this a permanent problem or transient phase?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am I reacting in faith and love or from a place of insecurity?	<input type="checkbox"/>
What could I do to 'be the change' I desire to see?	<input type="checkbox"/>
How could I be more kind, caring and considerate?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where does this interpretation come from and what's the evidence for it?	<input type="checkbox"/>

Rather than react out of inadequacy or self-doubt, consider an alternate response.

From the following list of questions, which would be the best to ask your spouse?



Is there something troubling you that you'd like to talk about? I'm here for you.	<input type="checkbox"/>
What do you think we can do better to help improve our love life?	<input type="checkbox"/>
I long to be intimate with you but feel like there's a blockage. Any ideas?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help me to understand from your perspective what you think and feel about our love life?	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to be a great lover and really please you. Can you help me achieve that?	<input type="checkbox"/>
I've noticed you've been resistant to my advances. Is there something I can be doing better?	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to draw closer to you. Other than sex, in what ways do you feel the closest bond?	<input type="checkbox"/>

A couple is walking away from the camera on a beach at sunset. They are holding hands and walking through shallow water. The man is on the left, wearing a dark t-shirt and shorts. The woman is on the right, wearing a light-colored, sleeveless top and shorts. The background shows the ocean with waves and a hazy sky with mountains in the distance. The overall mood is romantic and peaceful.

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

- EDWARD EVERETT HALE

Reviewing the highlights

Looking back on the course of your marriage and rehashing the good times is one of the fastest ways to reinvigorate optimism and refresh hope for your relationship. The narrative of your love story is revealed when sharing experiences and treasuring fond memories. Successful couples look back with fondness over the course of their marriage, with memories of the good times outweighing the bad.

From the list of questions below, take turns in asking each other about the great times you've experienced over the course of your marriage to date:

Q: What was your most memorable sexual encounter with me?	Q: Do you remember, what was one of your favourite highlights from our honeymoon?
Q: Do you remember how we first met? What was it that first intrigued you about me?	Q: Of all the dates we have been on, which to you was the most extravagant?
Q: When looking back at our more challenging times, what's one thing you're still grateful for?	Q: Of all the embarrassing things we've encountered, which was the funniest?
Q: Can you recall the time or moment when you first knew that you were in love with me?	Q: We've had our fair share of arguments, but what have you loved best about make-ups?
Q: Can you recall the time or moment where you first knew that you were in love with me?	Q: What was one of your most memorable sexual encounters with me?
Q: Of all of the reasons you married me, what do you still love?	Q: If you gave a speech at my funeral, how would you sum up the good times we've had?
Q: What do you think has been one of our greatest triumphs over the years?	Q: Of all the holiday adventures we've been on together, which was your favourite and why?



What do you believe?

Believing the best about your loved one, despite knowing their worst, takes great discipline. It's easy to jump to negative conclusions, especially when things don't go your way, but giving your spouse the benefit of the doubt serves to change your future outlook. The reason why this is so powerful is because your assumptions help shape your reality.



When you assume the best about your spouse, you tend to attract the best in them.

A Hope to Hold Onto

Hope leads to success. What you think about your future kickstarts your emotional drive to see it fulfilled. So rather than thoughts following your feelings, with hope, feelings follow your thoughts. If you can renew your mind and kickstart your emotional engine, you can transform your future. Despite your present situation or past experiences, hope is the faith to believe that a bright future still awaits (even if it's yet to be seen). To what extent do you hold on to hope as it relates to the various aspects of your relationship?



If optimism is the discipline to FOCUS on what's best, and belief, in faith, assumes the best, then hope, by faith, is the anticipation of the best... that the best is yet to come.

Future Goals

Hope is not just something that we have or don't have, hope is something we can cultivate. Hope is best cultivated by considering future objectives for your marriage – things that you both would like to achieve. Those lacking hope, tend to set goals that don't typically present as a challenge or provide opportunities for growth. In other words, goals that are relatively easy to achieve. Take some time to discuss what realistic short, medium or long-term goals you could set for the various aspects of your relationship, and record your answers below:



Peace & harmony:	
Communication:	
Family functioning:	
Honesty:	
Romance & intimacy:	
Emotional stability:	
Respect & honour:	
Spiritual walk:	
Support & nurture:	
Commitment:	
Financial security:	
Trust:	
Fun & laughter:	



**When you
invite God
into your
relationship,
the whole
game
changes.**

A Triple Bound Cord

“Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing...”

PSALM 92:13-14



What kind of future do you hope for? Scripture declares and science confirms that couples who commit to being integrated in a local church community are extended an extra layer of protection and security.

Q: What's your commitment to being part of a local church community?

RELATIONSHIP-PRAYER-PILLARS

Beyond being planted in church, which is like the ground or foundation, how do we remain closely joined with Jesus, who is the vine? Praying together means finding a private space together to be spiritually intimate. Praying with and for our spouse lets them know how much we care, and as a consequence, creates trust. As together, you cast your cares on God, prayer not only helps reduce stress, it strengthens optimism, belief and hope. As spiritual intimacy grows, emotional, mental and physical intimacy is also enhanced.

1

Earnestly thank God for your spouse and ask the Lord to bless them.

List their personality qualities and attributes, identify the contribution they offer to your relationship, and thank God for the sacrifices they make.

List the things that have transpired each day, and detail the specific areas of their life that you'd like God to bless and give them favour in.

2

Ask God to show you ways that YOU can be a better husband or wife.

List any areas you could potentially improve in, and any areas you can capitalise on. If you're unsure what these are, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal them to you.

Be expectant and honourable: Follow through on whatever God shows you. Fulfil your role and responsibility with a spirit of excellence.

3

Ask God to help you love your spouse in a way that also honours Him.

As He listens in to your daily interactions, pray that the way you speak to your spouse, would be like a most pleasant sound to His ears, not a screeching noise.

Pray that the way you speak to your spouse would be reflective of the well spring of your heart - at all times speaking LIFE (with optimism, belief and hope).

30-Day Challenge

Here is your challenge - if you choose to accept it. Consider charting a new course for your marriage by developing a new prayer habit. Commit to praying with one another every day over the next 30 days. If you skip a day, just add a day.

Are you up for the challenge?

"I do" "I don't"